



# THE FOURTH NAPOLEON

*by*

CHARLES BENHAM



THE LIBRARY  
OF  
THE UNIVERSITY  
OF CALIFORNIA  
LOS ANGELES



K. 136

watermark

vertical chain line.

as described











# The Fourth Napoleon





# The Fourth Napoleon

A Romance

by

Charles Benham



HERBERT S. STONE & CO.  
CHICAGO & NEW YORK

1897

I

**COPYRIGHT, 1897, BY  
HERBERT S. STONE & CO.**



15  
3502  
B4368f

## Book I

“TOUS LES BONAPARTES ÉTAIENT  
MORTS . . . EH BIEN, J’AI RAL-  
TACHÉ LE FIL”



# The Fourth Napoleon

---

## Chapter I

The first day of June, 189—, Walter Sadler awoke unrefreshed; the sun came streaming through his bedroom window and summoned him from Pimlico, and misery.

He was bitterly unhappy. A barrister of six years' standing, and still briefless; his body and soul kept together by a paltry annual dividend, which clothed him so that he was always shabby, fed him often insufficiently, and enabled him to idle out existence between his dingy rooms in Lupus Street and the Temple.

The first two years after his call had gone smoothly enough. His guardian still lived. He never wanted for money, and the house at Harrow, set in the midst of charming grounds, and filled with beautiful things, gilded what he chose to regard as his period of probation. He felt no desire to forego his contribution to that far-seen mound of patience which great men share in common as their noblest monument. He laboured diligently at law. He attended the courts daily; and if the sight of eminent leaders caused him pain, it was, after all, but a momentary pang. Had not they also endured like years of desolate pupilage?

The third year, all this changed. His guardian died. Our hero was prepared: the event had occupied its place in his horizon. He moved from Harrow to Lupus Street, from affluence to penury, with courage unshaken. His aspirations buoyed him. He rose earlier, ate less, worked harder. "He that now goeth forth weeping,"—this was his song night and morning; though his view regarding the nature of the "sheaves" to be brought back con-



tinued somewhat vague. His training, gained from books that dealt with Cicero and Demosthenes, and among young men perpetually thinking about Canning, inclined him towards a political career. School speech-days and debating societies, and afterwards the Union, had fostered an aptitude for declamation and flowing utterance, transmitted to him he knew not whence, seeing that, even if these gifts are merely contagious, his guardian had had none of them, while he was in total ignorance about his parents. But whither these talents led, this he knew well enough. From thirteen onward the Premiership had been ever in his dreams. All those that had spoken with silver tongues and now were silent he counted kith and kin. The living he merely envied. And this jealousy—not an uncommon trait in ambitious youth—lost none of its keenness from the fact that the political stage at the time held none for whom jealousy was warranted. A long line of statesmen had just ended. Oratory languished. Power, with its fascinating paraphernalia, was in the hands of lesser men; and halls which had echoed eloquence now served to scatter the sound of words, apt and copious enough, but devoid of either passion or profundity.

Nevertheless it is hard to labour without return. Four years slipped away into five, into six, and he came not a single guinea nearer the House of Commons. Hope faded,—imperceptibly, like the coming of night, and with the same remorselessness. His efforts relaxed. He rose late to dawdling breakfasts; left his chambers at three of an afternoon, to wander aimlessly about the streets. His powers of application became dissipated from long disuse. Indeed, for many months prior to the commencement of this story, he had been unable to devote ten consecutive minutes to any given object.

He turned over to escape the sunlight, and thought bitterly on the coming day. Beyond doubt, it would prove a replica of hundreds already gone. Aimless and heavy-hearted amid the busy morning, he would loiter down to his chambers, and sink into a chair before that hateful, dust-coated blotter which invariably greeted the first eager glance at his table. Next, to the courts; and

there he would find himself among others of his kind: men over whose faces he had watched disappointment stealing as the years went by; disappointment moving from the forehead downwards, to glaze the eyes; and animalism, disappointment's companion, creeping upwards over chin and mouth, and puckering the upper lip and nostrils,—so that the two commingled into masks that haunted him. The Inn library held out a prospect that was hardly more alluring. The whole Temple teemed with brethren in adversity: aimless loungers long since forgotten of hope; briefless, busy bodies fluttering between their chambers and the pillar-box beside the library, with all the appearance of cases waiting in both Courts of Appeal, or who wandered hither and thither in the throes of compilation, everlastingly whispering,—a habit engrafted, no doubt, by the constant pilfering from other men's books for the benefit of books of their own. And this melancholy throng was knit together by a bond of smouldering antagonism, which represented the fear felt by each that all the others would distance him in the race for fortune,—a sensation which is among the last of expiring ambition.

Was it really written that he should become like one of these? A member by merit of that miserable band of wasted lives? The thought was too horrible. He groaned aloud, then buried his face in the pillow, trying to shut out all remembrance.

Thus he lay close upon an hour, saturated with woe. And thus, no doubt, he would have lain until lunch-time, were it possible to lie long abed in furnished lodgings. His landlady, a fat, amiable woman with a sting, kept ceaselessly knocking. Once, she went so far as to insert a dishevelled head to inquire after his health. She indicated gently that it was a beautiful day; that the aristocracy, including her husband and the coal merchant round the corner, were gone to Epsom. At last she drove him into his meagre breakfast. But that completed, and the time come to start for his labour, he could not move. He lacked courage to go through the day as he had mapped it. He felt too despondent. He would pass the remainder of the week in idleness. Per-

haps, by frequent communion with his aspirations, and some blank hours of holiday, he might re-awaken energy to start again.

The day wore on. Walter stuck obstinately to his arm-chair and listless attitude, neither thinking, nor reading, nor sleeping—a picture of vacant despair. When at last he did find himself out of doors, it was without idea how he should spend the hours that must elapse before repairing to his usual eating-house.

He turned into Piccadilly, where he could see the wealth and luxury which he might not enjoy. For, as happened not infrequently, the sensuous side of him was in the ascendant. He wanted beautiful houses, with lofty rooms full of the most costly furniture; halls heavy with Eastern trophies which he himself had garnered; libraries lined to the ceiling with books; drawing-rooms decked in the style of France. France, too, should hold one of his palaces. A house in Paris; a villa at Cannes, nestling among palms and oranges; a modernized castle of the middle ages, washed by the grey sea, upon the Breton coast; a snow-white chateau amid the beauties of the Vosges. These made the paradise much desired of his bursting heart. The whole country, in truth, though his visits had been few and far between, possessed for him a curious fascination. He spoke the language with unusual excellence, an accomplishment which, he always understood, he owed to French governesses and a lengthy sojourn at a tender age in Paris.

Housed, his thoughts moved to other luxuries. He wanted carriages to vie with the most brilliant passing before him. He wanted elegant clothes; and he stole a glance at his frayed cuffs and shapeless garments. He wanted dainty things to eat, rich wines, and rare liqueurs. He pictured himself sipping green chartreuse among the oranges, lazily watching St. Honorat filmed behind the blue wreaths from his cigarette. How can one sip green chartreuse in Pimlico! Thus he came to the things which, save for homes in France, he desired most of all. Travel—to see India; to catch across the port bow the first glimpse of land, rigid amidst the

moving waters, black against the dawning sky; and to find that this cold strip opened itself into a world rich with sunshine and gorgeous unfamiliar life. To glide upon his yacht through Norwegian fiords, breathing the twilight air among a shifting panorama of fir-clad hills, seeming to encircle him on every side and to leave no outlet to another of the land-locked waters into which the sea has fretted that iron coast.

Imperceptibly these desires glided into dreams. His step quickened; he lifted his head once more. Poor fellow! he was drawing upon those floating millions which lie open for all men to dip into at their pleasure.

An old schoolfellow stumbled up against him, and rudely checked his triumphant progress. Walter tried to escape with a hurried greeting, but the other—full three years his junior, and still boyishly bashful—clung to him from very shyness. His own attire told of a limitless purse; and each minute, as the fuller comprehension of Walter's misery forced itself upon him, he grew more uncomfortable. He mumbled out random facts about himself in an apologetic tone, saying that he was in his father's business, and meant to spend August at Aix. Then he dashed into those consolatory commonplaces used so frequently by the friends of learned juniors, and thus passed on.

Walter had never tasted more bitter humiliation. At school, as in the world, a man's character leaks out without any conscious effort on his part. Not a boy in Sadler's house but knew that "Frenchy"—a nickname stigmatizing his proficiency in the Gallic tongue, his black hair, and sallow face—had made up his mind to do great things. Behold "Frenchy" on the road to glory!

Outside Devonshire House he came across another acquaintance, a barrister like himself, a man of fifty and upwards, who for years had eked out a scanty livelihood from law-reporting. Walter welcomed the meeting; for the elder man evidently liked him, and long ago had read his sorrowful face. Often upon the back benches, with a case of no public interest pursuing its dreary course, he would regale the latter with stories of men



who, having waited many years, had at last succeeded,—"contemporaries of my own, my dear fellow, I do assure you." To-day he laid a kindly hand upon the young man's shoulder, and gazed down into his face with eyes which, if they had lost the light of hope, still retained some glow of sympathy. He remarked his weariness, and cheered him with prospect of the long vacation, averring that rest was what he needed. Then, when Walter shook his head, the kind fellow whispered that he knew his complaint, which, moreover, was a curable one. The chance would come, he murmured, all in its own good time. When it did come—and he could not have said anything more consoling—Walter might not find himself so capable as he had imagined. He would be competent. That went without saying. But—but—it was a well-known fact that men, when they were waiting, contracted a disease which, for want of better designation, one might term the "genius of the untried."

Walter at parting thanked him with a grasp of genuine affection. Were not his words the absolute truth? Chance offers to all men, at some time or another, only let them know when and how to seize it. He, the briefless barrister, would wrest a competence from law, and force his way into the House of Commons. Then the world should see—well, what it should see.

Meanwhile he began to feel hungry. In crossing King Street, a fancy seized him. He came to a dead stop opposite Jervis's, and surveyed it with clouded brow. Its sparkling plate glass, panelled with white lace, gave it an air of subdued richness, which he found exceedingly enticing. What a contrast to the tawdry Italian meat-house where he usually dined. Walter was still busy with the words let drop by his kindly mentor. His chance would come, sure enough; only he must be ready to take it. His present life was the commencement of submer-sion. He must go about more; spend larger sums on food and clothes—and as a preliminary he began to search his pockets. His purse contained money that usually sufficed for seven dinners; dare he fling it away on one? But the impulse was too strong. He looked down

at his clothes; all said and done, many a Cabinet minister wore worse. Without more ado he pushed through the swinging doors, and made his way upstairs into one of the first-floor dining-rooms.

The apartment was almost empty. A couple of waiters near the door received him without overwhelming graciousness, and consigned him to an underling who was youthful and communicative. No less than three complimentary banquets—Sadler gathered from his informant—were to take place in the restaurant that night. The Prime Minister himself was to be at one of them. That gentleman in the farther corner was Mr. William Grover, the manager. He always came. Walter looked without interest at this man who kept two halls and three theatres going incessantly from year's end to year's end. The face was as miserable as his own. Then his eyes travelled to an opposite corner, where sat Sir Robert Redburne, a judge of the Queen's Bench, solacing himself for a day spent at the Old Bailey. His lordship's red face glistened. He held his claret against the light, as though invoking a benediction from heaven. And he was still in this interesting attitude, when a lady and gentleman, both in evening dress, stopped before his table. Walter could tell them at a glance. Mr. Blake, the celebrated painter, and husband of a still more celebrated wife: Mrs. Blake's novels were biennial and epoch-making. Our hero, watching this illustrious couple bend with easy familiarity over the judge's table, thought them the most fortunate people in the world. He only saw their backs. Otherwise he might possibly have noticed that Sir Robert received them with a smile of only modified pleasure, compared with that lately bestowed upon his wine; while the female Blake kept him under an unimpassioned stare, which said quite plainly, "I am taking your likeness, you shameless old wine-bibber, for future use." The season, the waiter resumed as a pendant to Monsieur's soup, had been good so far: people came in parties before the opera. That table yonder with the silver fountain and the flowers was reserved for the Earl of Framlingham, the late ambassador in Paris. They did say that M. Carache, the French Foreign Minister, and Mervan, the great tenor,

were both to be present. Did Monsieur know the Earl? Was he not to receive the vacant viceroyship of India? Monsieur must have heard Mervan? He was singing in Lohengrin that evening. What he ate would n't interfere with his voice; for he ate nothing, if one might judge from previous occasions.

The door opened. Both waiters fell into postures of humility. The Earl of Framlingham, late ambassador at Paris and—according to the papers—viceroy-designate of India, stepped into the room. Walter recognized him from his photographs. His great height, his heavy mouth, only half concealed by a beard; his faded, tired eyes, set beneath a well-formed forehead, in its turn surmounted by scanty hair, brown and but sparsely tinged with grey, completed a figure which was not readily forgotten.

Mervan was there, and Carache, whom our hero singled out without a moment's hesitation. What misery! foreigners admitted into exalted circles, closed against himself. Lady Framlingham, too, the daughter (as every one knew) of a high-born French nobleman, an intimate of the late Emperor. The Countess was short, but of an exceedingly distinguished presence; dark, with regular features, and a white skin that glistened even more than her numerous diamonds. There was no mistaking the young man who followed. Walter could have told him for her son, had he not known as much. Lord Mendril and he had been passing acquaintances at Oxford. He lifted himself in readiness to bow. But the young nobleman had lost all memory of the other's existence; favouring him with a bland stare. Sadler flushed crimson. His accursed condition! He wished to God he had never been born—that he might die—that—that—he scarcely knew what he did wish,—utter obliteration in whatever shape or form. The next instant he had forgotten the cut direct, Lady Framlingham's distinguished air and diamonds, or the cosmopolitan character of her husband's visiting-list. His restless eyes lit upon a face that kept them henceforth rivetted. His brain, seething with misery and discontent, grew conscious of a presence which swelled his discontent a thousand-fold, making it

almost contentment; increased his misery until it became the essence of delight.

She was a girl scarcely out of her teens, slim of figure. Her likeness to Lord Framlingham was marked enough to declare the relationship. She had his lofty forehead, and promised to be much above the middle height. But in many things she resembled neither father nor mother. Her oval face, ivory-tinted, and without colour; her wide grey eyes; her chiselled mouth and chin, beautiful yet full of resolution; her delicate nose, turned upwards the least bit,—these were features absolutely her own; as also the wealth of bronze-coloured hair, crowning her head, and, in Walter's eyes, completing her matchless charm. She was seated between Mervan and an unknown young gentleman who, as our hero discovered before long, was a Russian named Nicholas Fersen, an attaché at the embassy in Paris. He soon grew to detest these neighbours of hers. The respectful attention wherewith she treated the great, if somewhat elderly, singer galled him. As for Count Fersen, Walter hated *him*, because his treatment was the opposite of Mervan's. The girl appeared to hold this Russian of no account, though he never removed his eyes from her face, watching her with almost doglike fidelity, languishing under her monosyllables, brightening when she smiled, and torn between pleasure and pain when she laughed outright.

Occupied as he was, the young barrister felt that he in his turn was being keenly scrutinized, and by no less a person than the great Carache. He reddened and fidgetted under the minister's survey; and, at length, able to endure it no longer, looked round so that their eyes met. Even then the minister did not desist, quite unmoved by the glances of defiance which Walter indulged in. A perplexed look deepened over his own crafty visage. Finally he turned with a shrug to Lady Framlingham. "The gentleman," said he in French, "looks depressed. I could have pledged my life I knew him. It must be his face: he is a veritable little Plon-Plon." The resemblance, noted by friends and strangers alike on many a previous occasion, had long ceased to cause Sadler pleasure. To-night it gave him



the most acute annoyance. He once more sought Muriel's face, and the consolation that lay in its pure outlines. He trembled at the thought that presently he must go out into the night and lose all but its most imperfect memory. Certainly she would be at the opera, and he meant to follow her thither; but how could he count on finding the Framlingham box? No, he would never see her again. For once, however, Fortune favoured. At the opera, the boxes within the line of vision from his nook at the stage end of one of the "slips" were filling rapidly. He scanned their occupants; determined, if need be, to struggle to the parallel extremity of the opposite gallery, and commence his search afresh. Keeping this comfort in reserve, he made his scrutiny with a brave heart, hardly expecting immediate success. He obtained it, perhaps for that very reason. One, two, three boxes—in each case a blank. The fourth full of Japanese; an insult to this Englishman perched above the dust that lies thick along the roof of the topmost tier. Then the unhappy islander turned to a fifth. It was in the grand circle, only three off royalty. An attendant was placing the chairs. Walter searched its recesses, and straightway found—not without a start—what he sought so eagerly, the gleam of Lady Framlingham's diamonds.

Lady Muriel Mendril entered next behind her mother. She looked tired already. The overture began that minute. Thenceforward Walter's eyes lost sight of all things but the loved face. Sight and sound, combining, lapped him in dreams. Some were sorrowful. The Swan Song seemed his dirge. Nothing was left him, he reflected, as Mervan dragged his senses through this sinuous melody which breathes the woe of all the world, except despair and an heroic death. Others were visions full of joy. Never before had those figments of his brain been so minute in detail. He revelled in them. It was an orgy of preconceived fulfilments: a rebound against the drudgery of endeavour: the Longing for Fame translated into that, of all varieties of action the least exersive and the most satisfactory.

First he ascended the woolsack. Learned leaders,

whom in real life he knew by sight, and envied, prostrated themselves at the bar of their Lordships' House to imbibe his wisdom. None of the little mannerisms that mark great judges should be — *were* absent, from the patient look of suffering directed to the remarks of some other noble and learned lord, to those ejaculations redolent of acuteness, which look easy enough, and certainly are most effective. Mervan pricked the bubble; and so the second dream was an unconscious piece of flattery. He, too, was a great singer; Lohengrin his part. He could feel Muriel watching him, as she had watched Mervan; while he, like Mervan, lost himself in his rôle; the nameless, blameless knight who at times has given his sword and ring to others beside Elsa.

It must be remembered, his visions represented pictures, conceived originally under conducive circumstances at varying times and places, and now summoned afresh by a consuming hunger that turned everywhere for food. At one period of his life, say ten years back, and for about five months, Von Moltke had intruded upon Pitt and Fox and Bright, and made a serious struggle for the mastery. The attempt failed: war as a path to glory, no less than the church, surgery, the stage, fell before politics. To-night, however, the dreams of martial prowess came home with the rest. Walter transported himself to the French service and the Eastern frontier — one can't fight modern battles in England; Sedgemoor and blunderbusses forbid. With equal ease, he took a marshal's baton and the chief command; and, flinging himself into the midst of a terrible campaign, proceeded to reconquer the annexed provinces. So far afield among shadows will men go for admiration; and so devoid of humour are they, when they seek it.

The evening of an autumn day, and the close of the great battle that shall terminate the war. Gaunt and motionless, he sat upon his wearied charger, his face — as much like Moltke's as possible — composed in impassive folds. A heavy, grey overcoat enveloped him in statuesque outlines, and completed the picture. At his feet lay the roar of battle; perhaps a wounded soldier thrown in. He, silent as death, and hardly less power-

ful, directed events to their fulfilment, without so much as a twitching of the lips. And so he came to the picture that pleased him more than all. The Bridal March suggested it. Without the preliminary weariness of political clubs, wire-pullers, or contested elections, he passed to the front rank of English statesmen—becoming at one bound Prime Minister and the foremost orator of his time. The mists gathered, and cleared again. Once more he was lifted on high, to be seen of all men. Buckingham Palace and its balcony constitute a setting worthy genius; and though a greater one than he was present, this only increased his triumph. The courtyard below was thronged with troops bound for the wars, and come to take leave of their sovereign. The Mall held the populace in densely packed masses; and no soul there, soldier, civilian, not Majesty itself, but knew the master mind at whose bidding all this was. Again the mists gathered, bringing the last scene. Within the sacred portals!—benches and galleries crowded. He was in the midst of some marvellous peroration, born immortal. He did not miss a single detail from the scene around him,—not the piece of paper that, every now and then, floated to the littered floor. He marked the sea of eager faces, upturned to the sea of light above and fixed on his; he heard the breathless stillness, broken only by those tones which uttered soft persuasion, lulling his foes into acquiescence, binding all with fetters of gold. Muriel was present, fascinated with the rest; and this brought him to the contemplation of his great reward. They were married, and passing through life in sweet companionship: she, his constant consoler, giving him what comfort lies in gentle looks, gentle words, and unlimited admiration, while he repaid her with the protection of his strong arm, governing children and household with the benignant firmness he employed in governing his country. How easy the rôle of model husband and parent! The opinion of others being among the chief stimulants a man has to virtue; extend the circle of those who think about him, and you augment the incentive. If we behave ourselves because we spend our days amid a narrow surrounding of sisters and cous-

ins, we shall assuredly be saints, when the time comes that we have the world our audience. Walter knew that his private life would be pure and unselfish and high-minded, provided only he achieved his great desires.

Oh, the joy of these wild dreams! How could he tell that they were the last of their race, wanderers returned home to die? He regarded them very differently. The torch had flickered and almost expired; but now it was burning as brightly as before. To be worthy of Muriel, of his great future, he must possess his soul in patience, ready for the dawn.

And then the music ceased, and coldness came over him. He turned to reach his hat, and, looking again, found Muriel gone. Except for Carache, the box was empty; the girl and her mother might have been dreams, so quickly had they vanished away.

What should he go home for? To sleep? Sleep was not for idlers; and a braver heart might well have dreaded the prospect of vigil within those abominable walls. His mood was again despair unutterable. He turned listlessly into the slums round Covent Garden. The "poor" are always to be seen; and Walter, watching the clusters that hung about the evil-smelling streets, and lolled in doorways, thought bitterly of that larger army of poorer men which is invisible,—half-starved clerks, struggling ushers and curates and doctors, unemployed lawyers like himself, and the host of those who have the wages of Seven Dials without its simpler wants. And this train of brooding fancies continued long after he had passed into the Strand and mingled with the throng of roysterers whose whim it is to begin where respectable people leave off. He envied them too. Their cheeriness was obviously spontaneous. All seemed friends. And if nine tenths were intoxicated, they could not pay a heavier penalty for drunkenness than he did for sobriety. They enjoyed life while life lasted; basked in the brilliancy of gin-palaces; and went to perdition in battalions. And he—he slunk along the shady side of the selfsame road without a single friend. He longed for the companionship of the drunkard and



the harlot, so that he might sink at least with some one's hands in his. And at that moment Some one's face shone down from amid a radiance of another kind, and led him forth into silence, beside the river.

He leant across the stone balustrade. Not a soul was near him: how easy to slip down unseen into death and sweet forgetfulness! And what about to-morrow in the world he quitted? His body, swollen and repulsive, rose before his eyes. He heard the comment of strangers, caught by the sensational headline, "Suicide of a Barrister," and greedy to learn the history of yet another incompetent gone to his death because life was more than he could manage. He pictured the talk of his friends.—"I say, old man, did you know that that barrister who jumped off the Embankment, a month ago, was 'Frenchy.' Robertson met him in Piccadilly the same afternoon: the poor chap was looking very seedy and depressed. I *say*, what a finish to his fine ideas, ay! Going down for the match?"

From the sanctuary of an empty bench he heard twelve strike, and one, then sunk into a fitful doze. A policeman turned the glare of a dark-lantern on him and let him lie. Other tramps slunk by. He heeded nothing, except Muriel and his own misfortunes. When he dreamt, her face was everywhere, and once he started into wakefulness, uttering her name. After that, he could sleep no more. He glanced at his watch; it showed close on three, and the dawn of another hateful day. The sky eastward showed the same: in a final burst of passion, he resolved never to face the light again. He stumbled forward, as though to seek the river, then sank back, overpowered by the old dreads. "I am beaten," he murmured with a sob that might have gone to heaven. "I could have done so well—so well; but it seems the chance will never come. I accept defeat. I submit." No need of further words; the thing was finished. Long had he been hovering on the desolate confines. At last he was well inside.

He rose, chilled and weary. The sky was passing into purple. The dawn had come to touch his poor soul

with crimson fingers. The crisp air fanned his brow, and whispered hope. Birds awoke to sing the morning. Market-carts lumbered past him, smelling of the country. He almost heard the low murmur of the sea; the sea which has neither dawn nor evening, but always the same eternal freshness. It was the vigour of things born anew; it mingled with his blood. How could he chant a requiem in the midst of youth so universal? How be sorrowful, when the whole world was glad?

He turned that he might watch the rising sun. The railway bridge lay almost over his head, making the foreground of the broken horizon, and giving him through its trellised ironwork some taste of the copious light. Presently it contributed life as well. An unattached locomotive came forth from the covered way, and commenced to glide smoothly backwards and forwards, without any apparent object beyond attracting the young man's attention. It succeeded with a shriek of triumph, and vanished across the water, in the direction of Southwark. Walter started, struck by an idea which almost took away his breath. The engine had disappeared along the line towards Dover,—before heaven! it was pointing him to France.

To France! What a fool not to have thought of this before! If he must endure a life of poverty, let it be in the city which he loved. That was all. No need for further argument. The proposition burst upon him with blinding force. He succumbed at once. Directly the needful preparations were completed, he would leave England, never to return. Nay, he would realize his capital. The six thousand pounds, a legacy from some unknown relative, his sole support hitherto, should buy him one year of gorgeous life. He could not, of course, achieve a tenth part of his extravagant fancies, but he might do a good deal, and—as it seemed to him at the moment—all that he wanted. And as he went swiftly homeward, walking on air, he made his plans for the coming twelve months. Dreams no longer; instead, plain business calculations, and nothing included which he could not pay for.

Alas! a point, up till now not thought of, presented

itself as a bar to the adventure. The obstacle was a certain Count de Morin, who resided in Paris and gave himself over professedly to good works. Louis de Morin, to recount briefly what Walter knew of him, was an elderly French nobleman, formerly an under-chamberlain at the court of Napoleon III. His father, Richard Morin had been confidential valet to the great Emperor. After '70 Louis betook himself, with his title and a handsome competency, to a small house in the Rue Fabert, alongside the Invalides, where he had continued to live for close on thirty years, ambling about town, always unruffled and placidly benign. His friendship for Walter's dead guardian (as the former had understood) had originated in Louis Napoleon's English investments. He knew all that was to be known of Walter's circumstances, his unrenumerative calling, his poverty-stricken life; and he never wrote but he bade him work and hope. "Rome was not built in a day," the Count loved to repeat. "You will be Chancellor yet, and have your statue at Antibes." It would be humiliation indeed to come suddenly face to face with this keen old gentleman, and have to confess that he had thrown away hope and endeavour, and was buying a single year's enjoyment with the price of his life. For a time his brain sought other alternatives. Why not disappear into the unknown, where one always prospers?—India, for choice, the labour-house of many happier friends.

No, no; it must be Paris.

So he reached his doorstep, and turned to take a last vindictive look at Lupus Street. Somehow it seemed less hateful. It meant the city which once he had loved ardently enough—in days when he had regarded it as the scene of his anticipated triumphs. That was a time indeed when he could not bear to leave it for an hour, grudging as wasted every minute not spent within its walls.

Yes, but his misery had banished all that. Remorselessly cruel, the great city went upon its way, draining the life-blood of those who came to serve it. He detested its vanity; for he endued the city, as a whole, with the characteristics of some of its inhabitants, who fancy that

the exclusive road to fame lies through the capital. He would demonstrate how false this was. Others might choose to wait with humble front for the smallest token of relenting; not he! life elsewhere offered something better.

He laughed nervously, and shook his fist at the houses opposite. Lupus Street, so far as one could see on either side, was empty. The spirit moved him. Voice and hand uplifted, he broke into the well-known lines:

. . . thus I turn my back:  
There is a world elsewhere;

then turned his back and disappeared indoors.

## Chapter II

The night journey to Paris, itself delightful, brought a chance meeting worth more than all. At Calais the train was nearly empty. Walter, on his return from the buffet, found an intruder in the farther corner of his compartment, a young man who surveyed him with lazy indifference. "Hullo, Sadler," this stranger drawled out presently, "I haven't seen you for ages." It was Lord Mendril.

Walter's heart quickened. "Not since we were at Oxford," he managed to reply. My lord, less diffident, proceeded to put our hero through his paces, and discovered that he was a gentleman of independent means, who lived most of his time in Paris. And while he was thus exercising the privilege of his class, Sadler searched his face for some likeness to Muriel. He found a striking resemblance to Lady Framlingham. Like her, the young fellow was dark and French-looking, with black eyes and a fair complexion. The down on his lip could not hide her weak mouth; there was the same droop about the corners. And being thus engaged, the barrister forgot to answer the other's queries, and they went along in silence for a time in the dim-lit swaying carriage, until Mendril grew tired of this scrutiny, and broke forth into fresh questions mixed with views on life generally.

He turned next to French politics; how Carache (who was in the train) was going home to change places with Pontécoulant, the Premier. Then, in a month or less, when the Assembly should have upset Carache, Pontécoulant would retake the lead, and Carache slip back into his old office. This game of hot potatoes had been going on for several years. "It remains now—"



"The Orleanists?" hazarded Walter, bored to death.

"No leader. As for the Imperialists, that lost Bonaparte paralyzes Victor."

"What lost Bonaparte?" moaned our hero, already half asleep.

"You live in Paris and do not know that? Any child can tell you that Victor is not the real head of the family. A more direct article exists somewhere. But where?—that is the trouble: herding goats, perhaps, in Corsica." Then Mendril resumed personalities. "Somehow I had an idea," he said, "that you were a barrister."

Sadler gave a sickly smile. "I fear nothing so honourable. I am a mere miserable *rentier*, a man whose sole aim in life is to kill time."

"I presume you have some interests?"

"Really I don't believe I have. I *had*, but that time is past. No, I shall die what I was born, a wretched *rentier*. I shall hover between London and Paris, with occasional winters in Cannes, and a trip or two to India. Whereas if I had, say, six thousand pounds between me and the world, I might do something, become a successful blanket-maker or leading Q.C.; I might even get into the House of Commons and serve on committees, and feel at the end of life that it had not been altogether wasted."

"I can sympathize with you," said Mendril genially. "Your case is my own."

"You won't make me think that," Walter replied, encouraged into an affectation of abruptness; "your wings are not clipped like mine. To begin with, you need n't pine for yachts and moors—"

"If a moor can make you happy," Mendril laughed, "you must come one year to us in Scotland."

Sadler's face tingled. "I shall be delighted," he said. "You know what I mean; I use 'yachts and moors' merely as a concrete illustration of the power which a fellow can't get from a beggarly fifteen hundred a year."

"I call fifteen hundred a year very good," murmured Lord Mendril in tones of gentle reproach. Walter felt tempted to say, "So do I." He shook his head gloomily: "Not for a man who wants to 'live.'"

"No, perhaps not," acquiesced the other Walter.

If only our hero could have stopped there. "Now your case is very different. You are not hemmed in. Confess, you have a seat waiting for you. With you, an under-secretaryship, once you are in, can only be a question of a few years; you would—would?—*will* soon be on the Treasury bench. You have shown me how well informed you are in French politics"—Walter smiled winningly at the face opposite. It was staring at him in blank amazement—"I make no doubt you are equally well up in English. Own it, you are aiming at the Premiership?"

That minute a station clattered by them. Lord Mendril peered out of the window, then muttered, "Creil"; and there was a deal of significance in his voice. He said no more. And arrived at their destination, he gathered up his wraps so as to fill both hands, and with a curt nod disappeared onto the platform. It was a disappointing exit after such geniality. Walter felt it. Nor was he roused from his chagrin by coming face to face with Carache, who stared and seemed on the point of speaking to him, but did not, passing on, instead, with the greatest reluctance. What was Carache compared to Muriel? Alas! it looked as though this first chance had been frittered away.

Engrossed, however, in the delightful occupation of constructing the new life, Sadler soon forgot about Lord Mendril; and even Muriel faded into the background. The year had begun. Many preparations had to be made before he could sit down to its full enjoyment.

Our hero alighted at the Terminus Hotel, weary and travel-stained, but full of eagerness. Before ten he was on the boulevards, busy with the foundations of his fairy castle. There were things, of course, which could not, by any stretch of ingenuity, be purchased until his flat came into actual being. But what he could buy there and then, he did. Oh, the ivory-handled brushes and tortoise-shell combs! the razors and scents and soaps! Boots and shoes, too, and every description of wearing-apparel—in a word, a veritable trousseau, mingled with

a dash of the conventional colonial outfit. In the matter of furniture, his purse ran riot, striving to incarnate so many departed dreams. Wonderful chairs and inlaid tables, dainty little sofas for nooks not yet created, desks for alcoves which he might have to hew out of solid wall. It was his mood—he could not wait. Glass and china involved less risk, while still exercising all his talent. He selected a dessert service which the proprietor declared was the most beautiful thing in the shop. It was likewise the most expensive. The common crockery, the brooms, the very mattresses, received attention. But choosing wines gave fullest play to the bizarre element in his nature; that whimsical leaning towards every spot where he did n't happen to be at the moment. The recommendation about his claret was not so much its velvet taste and delicious odour, as the atmosphere—and labels—of Rauzan-Gassies, Latour, and Lafite, which it brought in its train. He literally went on tour through the Haut Sauternes. Château Y'quem, Chambertin, Ruedersheimer, Asmannshausen, Capri, and Old East India contributed to this curious taste. His cellar promised to be mainly a matter of geography; and the bad habit that obtains among bereaved champagne-growers of calling their produce after their own names caused him genuine annoyance. So also with tobacco, where the results might have proved fatal. Walter was no smoker. Hamburg suggested something to him; La Intimidad: Excelsos did not. He made a desperate fight to buy the former, only giving in when the dealer smoked one for his benefit. Books formed another item; statuary and pictures; even a pair of antlers (in memory, perhaps, of Lord Mendril's moor); in fact, a list of such marvellous completeness as six years' brooding alone could have produced.

He bought a couple of carriages; engaged the servants; and then at last had to stop—just past noon, three days after his arrival in Paris. At his hotel he found a note from a house-agent. It enclosed orders to view two flats. One was a treasure in the Rue de Berlin, belonging to M. Verre, the ex-Premier. The other was also a gem, in the Rue du Bac; if anything, perhaps a

little better situated. The present occupant, so wrote the agent, waxing biographical in his desire to fix this wealthy client, was a widow lady, Madame Brisson, mother of the Colonel Brisson who commanded a regiment of engineers. The outside view of the apartment prepossessed Walter in its favour. He rang the bell, feeling instinctively that he would know the sound better by and by.

Madame gave him a gracious reception. As an answer to his request that the servant might show him over and then out, the lady smilingly beckoned him to a chair. Her hair was snow-white, her face very, very pale; though this pallor was probably heightened by her black dress, which, even when she was seated, showed her stately figure to advantage. A touch of haughtiness, capable of deepening considerably, as Walter soon discovered, marred the sweetness of her expression.

They talked a while on indifferent topics—the weather, and the longing one felt for the country these hot days. She was going there, provided she let her flat. Her son, Colonel Brisson, had no use for home any longer; “they intend to move him to Nancy; so I can end my days at Troyes, where I was born.” Her charming frankness had its effect on Walter: his hostess was good enough to express surprise when she learnt that he was an Englishman.

“But Monsieur is absolutely without accent,” she exclaimed. “Surely he must have lived long in France.”

“No,” replied Walter dubiously, his brain mystified by the half-forgotten lies which he had told Lord Mendril; “no; I am an English barrister.”

“A noble profession. Monsieur perhaps means to practise as an English advocate in Paris?”

“Exactly. A small opening—and—and London is so terribly sad.”

“London is not alone in that,” she murmured, then added more cheerfully:

“Monsieur has travelled much over our country?—not Provence? Ah, you must go there. Along that coast one spot is more beautiful than another.”

“You frequently visit the south?”

"Not since my husband's death: he died at Cannes. Not at all, you could not be expected to know. He was wounded in the war, and died some months later. Ah, Monsieur, what a crime that was! For that alone the Bonapartes can never hope to return. At least the Republic has given us over twenty-seven years' unbroken peace. It will be an ill day—ah, but that can never happen."

Sadler grasped her meaning. It was a reference to the lost Bonaparte hidden away somewhere in the wilds of Corsica, concerning whom Lord Mendril had spoken. Madame went on: "Others know the bare fact; very few know the reason. I know, and Jean knows, and Monsieur de Morin knows and—"

Walter was bolt upright.

"Monsieur is acquainted with the Count?"

"No, indeed not."

"He is a clever man, and I have good reason to be grateful to him. But I have been talking about matters which cannot possibly interest Monsieur. He must forgive me: we are all so excited in Paris just now. Had it not been for the President and those good men MM. Pontécoulant and Carache, the Republic must have succumbed. But whatever happens to the Republic, none of them can return."

Walter felt no interest. Or if he did—only to this extent, that things might go on quietly until he had come to the end of his six thousand pounds. He said as much.

Madame reassured him.

"There is nothing to fear."

"You take a weight off my mind."

"M. Carache has to-day settled his ministry—you have heard, without doubt. Pontécoulant is to be foreign minister; in fact, the two change places. The kind God preserve us from war!"

She sighed and glanced at a small miniature of the great Napoleon, which was set above the face of the clock. She started, looked sharply at Walter, turned again to the miniature, then subjected the visitor's face to a second scrutiny. She still had hold of his card; she glanced hastily down at it. "Walter Sadler?" she mut-



tered, "Walter Sadler?" and then a sudden light came into her face. She rose to her feet. "Your Royal Highness," said she passionately, "is behaving in a very cruel and cowardly fashion."

Walter sat glued to his chair, gazing at her in hopeless bewilderment.

"You are behaving in a very cruel and cowardly fashion," she repeated angrily,—*"in a very cruel and cowardly fashion. I am not afraid to tell you so to your face."*

"But I am Walter Sadler — a barrister," gasped out our hero.

"Your Highness is good enough to laugh at me. This is one of those domiciliary visits with which we are all familiar. In heaven's name"—passing from scorn to piteous pleading—"spare me, and go to those who can give you the lives of their dear ones without being rendered absolutely desolate."

"Really—" faltered Walter, "I don't know what to say or do?" He began to wonder whether the Duc d'Orléans wore a beard.

"You are all alike, you Bonapartes. Fair words to cover your treachery."

So that was it. His likeness to the first Napoleon, added to her own highly wrought condition, had resulted in this strange fancy. Evidently she spent her existence on the look-out for the lostling, of whom every one appeared to have heard, save himself. No doubt she suffered from monomania; it struck him that her eyes bore the trace of madness. And he was the Corsican goatherd come to claim his own! He bethought him of his dead guardian, the quintessence of respectability; of his own humdrum days at their suburban home; of Winchester and Oxford and the Temple,—all of them such a long way off the Corsican mountains, where the real article was doubtless at this moment playing simultaneously on two pipes and watching half a dozen goats. The bare contrast nearly sent him into a burst of boisterous laughter.

He determined to humour her. "Madame has been

led astray by my likeness to Napoleon. Believe me, it is a resemblance of which I am no longer proud."

Madame tapped her foot impatiently on the ground. "Why do you play with me? There are other—" she stopped abruptly, turning to the somewhat lame conclusion, "Your likeness puts the matter beyond a doubt. You have come to take my—"

"I repeat to you, you are wrong," he said, on his side beginning to lose patience. "Cannot you believe my oath?"

"I expected oaths."

He shrugged his shoulders, turning at the same minute to take his hat from the table beside him. She no sooner saw his intention than she seemed seized with a feverish desire to get him out of the place as quickly as possible. She swallowed her indignation sufficiently to hold forth a lifeless hand. She ventured to bow, all the while edging him closer to the door.

But the manœuvre failed. The door swung open before she touched it. Her son entered. Walter had no difficulty in making out the relationship; albeit the newcomer was gaunt and iron-grey, nearer fifty than forty, and resembling Don Quixote most of any human being. Madame and he had height in common. They held themselves like steel ramrods.

His mother's face, Walter's as well, bore unmistakable traces of battle. Colonel Brisson looked from one to the other in surprise.

"The Prince has come," said the woman sullenly.

Brisson started. "Walter Sadler?" he asked of her in an excited whisper, which did not reach Walter's ears. She nodded. Without another word he sprang to where the young barrister was standing, and flung himself upon his knees at the latter's feet.

"Welcome home, your Majesty!"

This put the matter beyond a doubt. The mother's monomania not only existed, but was such a stern reality that it had infected the son. Walter, with his habitual acuteness, which he owed to nature rather than practice, saw at once how the whole thing lay. Here were two people, Imperialist by tradition, and consequently predisposed

to keep one eye open for the coming of the lost Bonaparte, whose minds had been unstrung by the instability of affairs. Possibly they did not even go so far afield among absurdities as to suppose him to be the Corsican goatherd, but mistook him for Victor, who no doubt bore some more accountable resemblance to the chief of the race, and made the most of it.

And yet—and yet—the homage of this gaunt Don-Quixote-looking man was intensely sweet.

“Please do not kneel to me. Cannot you see that you are placing me in a very ridiculous position?” The more ardent portion of this appeal was wrung from Walter’s lips by an attempt on Brisson’s part to kiss his hand. This is a process requiring more practice than even visions afford before a man can submit to it with any sort of grace.

“Jean,” Madame cried out, dragging her son from off his knees, and not over-gently either, “I will not suffer this treason. You are a soldier of the Republic; you shall not betray it.”

He was turning on her with a violent answer, but Walter lifted his hand,—already infected by Brisson’s homage,—and the latter left the fierce words unspoken.

“Enough of this,” exclaimed our hero. “I cannot make either of you believe my story. At least let me depart in peace.”

“His Majesty will surely permit me to escort him to the Rue Fabert?”

This was the second time Walter started at a reference to De Morin. But the whole thing was more than his brain could manage at the moment. He shrugged his shoulders, suffering that to stand as his answer.

Brisson repeated the question.

“I do not understand what you mean. I am not going to the Rue Fabert. I do not know where it is. I have never heard it mentioned before to-day. I am going straight to my hotel. Please allow me to pass.”

“Then the Count de Morin is not in Paris?” hesitated Brisson.

“How can I tell?” Walter cried with attempted flippancy. “I do not know him”; but the uneasy suspicion

fitted through his mind that this was some huge practical joke devised by the Count to demonstrate the foolishness of this wild freak of his. When we live in perpetual contemplation of our own thoughts and doings, we forget that the rest of the world has something else to think about.

A sudden idea struck him. "Tell me this," he asked of Brisson, "who do you suppose I am?" The other raised his shoulders in deprecation of so childish a question.

"Very well," said Sadler. "Anyhow, let me hear what it is that has made you think that I am he— whoever he may be—for whom you take me?"

Brisson glanced dubiously at his mother.

"Your obvious likeness to the first Napoleon," he began in great perplexity. Madame had subsided into a condition of cheerless disdain.

"Well?" urged Walter.

"Then the story about the rightful heir."

"Ah, so you take me to be the rightful heir?"

"Most certainly," Brisson replied blankly.

"But why?"

"Your obvious likeness, and your na—"

"Jean!" broke in Madame with warning voice.

Jean, whose grizzled face hardly looked a fitting subject for parental discipline, gazed helplessly about him. "Your obvious likeness," he repeated lamely.

"Really, Monsieur," came the sharp answer, "you do less than justice to your common sense. My name is Walter Sadler, for the hundredth time, and I am an Englishman. I have lived all my life in London. My parents—"

He stopped in the midst of this new sentence. Perhaps Madame read his thoughts. "I am tempted to believe, after all," said she softly, "that Monsieur is right. Now I come to look well into Monsieur's face, I find the likeness much less striking."

"If Monseigneur desires to remain unknown," Brisson assented, laying a hand upon the knob, "at least he will leave us his address. As for me, I am to be found at the barracks in the Rue de Penthievre," and the worthy fellow blushed.

"The Terminus Hotel," Walter murmured mechanically and with eyes staring. The Colonel went with him even to the street door, much beyond his mother's jurisdiction. At parting he bowed as to an ordinary visitor. The barrister, however, heard a muttered farewell, "*Monseigneur, au revoir!*"

The latter stood for awhile dazed and motionless. Who *were* his parents? For answer, the merest breath of remembrance that he had only come to Harrow after a long journey and many changes; that before his arrival there everything in his life had been chaos enshrining the ghosts of tear-stained faces that circled round his infantile person, looking down at him with unceasing pity. Surely the thing began to piece itself together in a marvellous way. He was the Prince, without a doubt, hidden by some one, for some reason, up till this present hour. Some one?—say at once De Morin, who should learn that his schemes had failed. Pish!—here was he building up a magnificent fabric on the ravings of two lunatics. He must have more to go on than his mysterious origin before he could satisfy even himself that he was the long-hidden Napoleon.

And as for rushing round to the Rue Fabert with reproaches, the thing was madness. He must manage De Morin very gently, not breathing a word about the Brissons or his own suspicion, but giving the old fellow an unvarnished account of his late miserable life, thus tacitly inviting a recital of the story so long withheld.

The whole business, he thought, would afford him a chance of showing what was in him—tact, finesse, above all, coolness of judgment. His lightest act upon this eventful afternoon would one day be history. At last he was on the great stage! and as he went towards the Rue Fabert he hugged himself with a new-found satisfaction.

At De Morin's door he met with check number one. The Count was absent at Aix-les-Bains, and would remain there till the end of the month. His address, *Poste Restante*,—the servant could give no information beyond that.

This rebuff upset Walter's calmness. He no longer suspended judgment on De Morin's conduct. The latter



had been guilty of abominable treachery. Nor was it hard to suggest a motive. In all human probability the wretch had embezzled Walter's inheritance. But he should pay a heavy price; and the young fellow indulged in an ugly laugh as he pictured the old fox coming, in the midst of his morning glass, face to face with the man he had so cruelly wronged.

A train to Aix, he discovered on inquiry at his hotel, was just departing, while the next did not leave before night. Sadler hung about between his bedroom and the boulevards, rehearsing how he should beard the delinquent when they met. In the midst of a *bock* and an harangue on the duties of honest trustees, he be-thought him suddenly of Colonel Brisson. He started off instantly for the barracks in the Rue de Penthievre. An orderly received him at the Colonel's quarters and administered check number two.

"Is Colonel Brisson in?" Walter inquired, breathlessly eager.

"No, Monsieur. He was here two hours ago, but not since."

"Perhaps you can tell me when he will be back?"

"No, Monsieur."

"When is he usually back of an afternoon?"

"About now," the servant answered, first consulting a huge timepiece.

Walter heaved a sigh of relief. "Good; I will wait."

"I am afraid Monsieur will have to wait a long time."

"But you said that he would be back about now."

"Pardon me; I never said so."

"But usually—"

"Ah 'usually' is different. My master will not be back at his usual hour to-day."

"Where is he?"

"In the train," the man stolidly replied, then observing that the visitor had had enough of his soldierly precision, he added: "The Colonel has gone to Aix."

Walter turned away in silence, a chill at his heart. It was fear. He trembled to find himself thus suddenly the figure round which others worked and took long

journeys: his life had not fitted him for so uncanny a position. He fled back to the boulevards and another *bock*.

What would happen at Aix? De Morin would know how to persuade this honest but weak Brisson to anything, and was likely to use his power, once he learnt of Walter's arrival. Was it to be supposed that the Count, old in cunning as in years, treacherous, would patiently abide the coming vengeance? He must be cautious: he was sure to hear from Aix before long; the message probably an assassin's dagger. To proceed thither would be to place his head into the lion's jaw. He must await the development of events.

Presently, remembering that he was a Bonaparte, he commenced to mutter "*kismet*," and so loafed out the remainder of the evening on the boulevards, imbibing *bocks*. When he got finally to his hotel—it was nearing midnight—he felt far too worried to sleep. He tried the papers. Naturally enough he could not take in a single line; but went back, and back, as the minutes ran, to the contemplation of late events.

All was conjecture and hypothesis. How did he know that he was the missing Prince? Why should De Morin be hostile? If De Morin were hostile, would the weak Colonel disclose his address? With these thoughts chasing each other through his brain, one instant he was for starting up and catching the night train for Aix; the next, for saving the English boat; always, in the end, remaining glued to his chair, prostrate and inert.

All his thinking life had he been crying unto the Lord to grant him some great occasion. At the moment his need was wellnigh passed endurance, the occasion had been given him,—and then—and then he could not use it.

It was the first time he had even questioned his own capacity; and they proved doubts easily allayed. His sluggishness was a foreign importation from the miseries of recent years. A freer life would banish it, as God's bright air some nauseating vapour. Besides, he did not propose to run away from Paris, and it was obvious he could not sally forth there and then to raise the banner

of the lost Napoleon. No, no,—and he muttered as much out loud, though in the public reading-room,—any strong man thrown into the midst of such shadows would act identically the same way. He must watch and wait, though he had n't the faintest idea how he should do either. The other occupants of the room thought that he was on his way to Charenton “with a friend.” Despite these reassuring reflections, he sought his couch unconvinced. A small table, bought that very day, and delivered at the hotel by mistake, lay in a corner. He examined it listlessly; it was inlaid, a piece of delicate marquetry, supported on a rim, and tapering legs of polished wood. He caressed its shining surface, and thought him how it would help the other glories of his drawing-room. His last look, before switching off the electric light, was turned lovingly in its direction. The result proved most satisfactory. The delicate shape acted as a sedative, lulling him into that resigned spirit which alone induces sleep.

## Chapter III

It must not be supposed that the inlaid table procured Walter more than a single night's oblivion, or that the three weeks which this chapter purports to cover was not also a period of torturing anxiety, because one of much apparent happiness. Indeed, not a day passed without some repetition, in a more or less modified form, of those confused fears and jumbled arguments that had floated through his brain on the afternoon of the Brisson incident; and many a time did he hasten round to the flat in the Rue Fabert, led by a sudden and ungovernable impulse, only to stop dead upon the threshold, not daring to risk the chance of an interview with its sinister inhabitant. And as time went on, and there came no sign of life from Aix, he became more and more convinced that he was the missing Bonaparte, and De Morin a traitor. These two convictions grew to haunt him wherever he went. So that in the most brilliant drawing-room—and, thanks to Madame Verre, he visited many very brilliant—he never lost sight of his own crown or De Morin's dagger. But he had decided at the beginning that he must "watch and wait"; in other words, that he must go on with his new existence, and suffer things to take their course. Accordingly, he went on with his new existence, spending far more recklessly, now he knew who he really was, and buying much less happiness.

Monsieur Verre, the ex-Premier, who, it will be remembered, figured on the second card, proved a lucky find. His flat, situated in the Rue de Berlin, the locality Walter preferred, was an exceedingly good one, and a nearer approach than any he had yet seen to what he wanted. The Verres themselves were most obliging. Their furniture was already in a new villa at St. Cloud; they were

only too glad to follow it, and to leave him in immediate possession. He worked hard. Within fourteen days of his arrival, he was installed, and his dream begun. And at this point the humble chronicler would wish nothing better than to break away from the thread of his narrative and give a rhapsodical account of the new abode. The place merited superlatives. The library, in particular, upon which Walter had expended most money and trouble, enchanted all who beheld it. Madame Verre declared that it was a room more often dreamt of than seen; while Monsieur, her husband, never entered it without pretending to forget the position of the door,—a little bit of pantomime meant to demonstrate the marvellous change effected by the new tenant. The remaining apartments came but little behind; but, for Walter, the virtue had gone out of them all. Compared with the *Élysée*, he found them small and meanly furnished; and the blue silk hangings that adorned his bedroom seemed to harbour the lurking murderer come on De Morin's business. So, perhaps, the less said about the furniture, the better. If it failed to afford the gratification he had looked for, at least the reason was a substantial one.

Monsieur and Madame Verre—as has been indicated already—did more than merely let him have their flat. They came and sat in it. Walter had always intended that his landlord or predecessor in the tenancy should introduce him into society, and he succeeded beyond what he had any right to expect. For ex-Premiers, the Verres were wonderfully genial and easy of approach. They accepted the young man's references as establishing his eligibility as well as his credit; and when Madame learnt incidentally that he knew Lord Mendril, her cordiality exceeded all bounds: she and Lady Framlingham having been, as it appeared, acquainted for many years.

Under their auspices, Walter soon found his way into the best society, mainly ministerial, as was to be expected, and very substantial. And inasmuch as he was able to pay back in kind, giving unsurpassable little dinners and evenings devoted to the most exquisite music, his success was immediate, and promised to be lasting. Of course he was not a lion; but wherever he



went, he was always welcome. He began to be known as "the rich Englishman." The women discussed his interesting melancholy; the men, his wines and superb cigars. Newspapers noticed his presence at fashionable gatherings; and in the Bois people commenced to look out for him and his handsome steed, which, by the way, he bestrode without much skill or elegance. And not a few of those who knew him, as an acquaintance or by repute, but had their suspicions that the English police would presently appear and claim him for their own. It was fame,—of a tepid order indeed, but still fame; and measuring it by the standard of that to which he was really entitled, he found it so much dust and ashes.

His position was, more than ever, hateful on occasions when chance, or rather Monsieur Verre, brought him in contact with the really great. Almost the first visit to St. Cloud, his host led him the round of the existing Cabinet—the greater part of which was present—and introduced him to the various ministers. The eminent Carache did not appear to remember his face; he gave him two fingers and a frigid stare. Pontécoulant gave him a frigid stare and two fingers. Fréron, Minister of War; Petard, Finance Minister; and Graves, Agriculture—all smaller men, and therefore less generous, gave him one finger apiece, and didn't even look at him. But this was nothing compared with an experience endured a few nights later in the same place. Walter had been invited to a small reception.

"Sadler," cried Monsieur, darting down upon the young man the moment the latter entered Madame's drawing-room, "whom do you think I have got to-night?"

Sadler had not the faintest idea.

"A compatriot of yours, my dear friend," exclaimed his host, rubbing his hands and smiling gleefully. "Now guess!"

"Really I cannot."

"The English Minister of the Interior! Come and let me introduce you."

The Englishman sat chatting gaily with Madame Verre, a charming smile over his clean-shaven face. He

was a rising young man of about forty-two, entirely self-made, by profession a barrister like Walter, and the reputed possessor of an austere character the least bit tempered by society and success.

"Monsieur," cried Verre the irrepressible, "permit me to introduce a countryman of yours." The minister looked up, and at the same instant his charming smile vanished away. He surveyed Walter with great seriousness, at though the latter had been recently convicted of murder, and had come in person to pray a commutation of the death penalty; bowed gravely, then turned straightway back to Madame Verre and resumed his gay smile and charming conversation.

Monsieur Verre, who was blessed with acute, penetrating eyes which saw nothing, wanted to prolong the torture. But Walter refused. He turned as abruptly from the minister as the minister had turned from him; and for the remainder of the evening kept the whole length of the drawing-room between them.

The reception he met with at the Élysée, curiously enough, was in marked contrast to the interviews above alluded to.

Bitter experience had taught him to fight shy of official personages. The night he first went to a Presidential reception, he made his bow and then slunk into the background, avoiding any quarter of the room where the chief of the state might happen to be, and sternly rejecting M. Verre's offer to obtain him a less formal introduction.

He was standing alone in a deserted corner of one of the drawing-rooms, with disconsolate eyes fixed on the magnificence around him. His heart was very heavy. John Harmon in contemplation of "Boffin's Bower" might have endured similar misery; that is, had John Harmon been a less philosophical person. Of all earthly torments, surely this is the most terrible,—to see one's inheritance in the hands of the stranger.

A kindly voice murmured in his ear. "Monsieur finds the scene an interesting one?" He turned: it was the President, smiling at him with an expression full of the sweetest amiability.

"Yes, indeed," replied Walter. "Especially as I have never been privileged to see it before."

"You are here with Monsieur Verre, are you not?" asked the President. "Ah, yes, I remember. He has been telling me about you. You are the young Englishman who has come to reside here. We Parisians must take your choice as a very great compliment."

"It is very kind of Monsieur to say so. One does not care to run down one's — the country where one has lived all one's youth; but England is so sad and dismal."

"Of course you are quite familiar with our beautiful France? I need hardly ask the question; you speak our language so perfectly."

"I am afraid, Monsieur," broke out Walter, blushing, "I am sailing under false colours. I have lived all my life up till now in England; that is true enough. I was educated there; but—but by birth I am a Frenchman. My mother and father were both Fren—Itali—French: I was born in France."

The President continued to regard him with the same kindly interest as hitherto, neither increased nor lessened. "Pardon, Monsieur," said he, "I did not catch your name."

"Walter Sadler," blurted out the other, becoming quite scarlet.

"How deeply interesting. It illustrates the magnetic influence exercised by our dear country; does it not, Monsieur?" and with another bow, more amiable than the first, the gracious, stately presence moved away.

At home Walter's life was somewhat less varied. His visiting-list did not yet include such giants as Carache, Pontécoulant, or English Home Secretaries. Madame Verre invited for him; and as she frequently remarked, "The Premier will come in time—Rome, recollect, was not built in a day." Once, Walter tried to get Lord Mendril. His lordship was unhappily engaged, and therefore could not come.

Apart from entertainments, given or received, his days were simple enough. He lounged through his mornings, mostly in rapt adoration of his bindings, lunched, rode in the Bois, or, now and then, made his

excursion to the Rue Fabert. And this brought the time round again to the evening party, or the opera where he would sit through Lohengrin without turning a hair.

The next time our hero came across Carache was at a reception given by the President of the Senate. The indefatigable Verre insisted on subjecting Walter to a second presentation. The Premier welcomed them with momentary closed lids, accompanied by a look of intense pain. He was a man with a pointed face, somewhat resembling a fox's, that contained prominent green eyes and a sharp nose. His hair was brown and wispy; while his ears were almost as prominent as his eyes—a touching memento, this last, of earlier days, connecting the middle-aged statesman with the child whose nurse had not done all she might have for his future beauty. Altogether, it was a countenance fitted for action rather than repose; its present look of ennui did not suit it.

“Hullo, Verre, how are you?” he murmured faintly, facing the inevitable.

“Splendid, thanks. Sadler and I saw you standing by yourself, so we thought we would come and cheer you up a bit. I say, old man, I nearly unhorsed you in the Chamber, this afternoon.”

“M. Sadler?” pondered Carache; “M. Sadler?—I have not the pleasure of knowing the gentleman.”

“Good heavens! you shook hands with him at my house, only ten days ago.”

“Did I?” murmured Carache. He at once assumed the levee smile of the third quality, usually reserved for minor government employees; and thrust forward two fingers. “Monsieur, I am charmed to see you”; then he yawned and looked at the chandelier. Presently he pulled himself together, and without further words clave his way through them to another quarter of the room.

“Carache is often like that,” Verre remarked, glancing affectionately after him; “and—and—ah, here is Madame.”

Madame Verre was as incisive as her husband was outspoken. She had, moreover, a curious trick of turning up her eyes so that only the whites were visible. It did not add to her attractions, which, to speak truth,

were not great. But it contributed much to her generally trenchant demeanour. "There, I can't look at you," these sightless orbs appeared to say, "you are really too weak and foolish for *that*;—but go on, I am listening."

"Lady Threpps *is* going to give a ball," she cried, directly the young man was well within hearing. "We received our cards just before we left home. The last Wednesday in July, the date is. Have you yours yet?"

"I do not know the ambassadress."

"Ah, but you are a distinguished countryman of hers; besides, you are a friend of the Framlinghams—"

"Pardon, Madame; I never said so."

"Lord Mendril, I mean. It is the same thing. I had a letter from Henrietta Framlingham the other night. She says that no doubt her sons have many college friends whom she does not even know by name. Oh yes, Lord Mendril will get you an invitation. He is a charming boy, just like his dear mother. Muriel takes after her father"—Walter started—"Charles,—well, I do not know whom he resembles."

"Yes, yes," chimed in Monsieur Verre, "it would be a thousand pities if you did not go to your own embassy. You have been everywhere else, and have met every one of note,—the President, Carache, Pontécoulant,—and been most amiably received by them."

"Madame," began poor Monsieur Sadler.

But Madame, who had been displaying the whites of her eyes all through the late marital harangue,—they resembled electric advertising discs,—recovered her vision in time to prevent any protests.

"That is settled. Monsieur Sadler will get his card through Lord Mendril."

"I will go in the morning," murmured Walter. And the fact is more easily recorded than explained,—although convinced that he was the missing Bonaparte, he did not relish the idea of another interview with this disdainful young nobleman.

"The thing is done every day," responded the good lady. "By the by, the Framlinghams are coming to



France this summer; they have a villa near Paris. You must get Lord Mendril to introduce you."

That same evening our hero made the acquaintance of Count Nicholas Fersen, the young Russian attaché, whom he had seen first at Jervis's restaurant among Lord Framlingham's guests. And a very pleasant fellow he found him,—at the outset, that is to say. For one thing, the Count had height and a handsome face. He was extremely frank, and he inclined to friendliness with all men,—qualities not usually looked for in your youthful diplomat. His comments on the state of Europe were most refreshing. Under the steady gaze of his clear and fearless grey eyes Walter wondered what he had done to deserve such confidences.

He began with Alsace-Lorraine. Directing Sadler's attention to a group of ministers gathered round Verre and Carache, who appeared in heated argument, he observed, "Had our friends been less interested in their own quarrels, a month or so back, France might have done something over yonder."

Walter opined that France had forgotten all about the provinces. The other dissented, and not by any means in low tones. "France is sick of the present gang," he declared. "Had there been a decent pretender here in April the Republic must have fallen. This place reminded one of Constantinople, or London during a general election," and the boy's face broke into a charming smile. "I assure you both Carache and Pontécoulant went about in chain armour. But no one arose to seize the advantage. We all know the amount of grit in the Bourbons. As for the Imperialists, well, the less said about them and their precious Lost One, the better."

"You do not credit the story?" asked Walter, commencing to tremble.

"Not I. The supine Victor is at the bottom of it. He prefers Brussels, and quiet. As for Louis, he is too conscientious ever to do any good. An old colonel of his regiment told me once that the fellow seemed always in silent prayer. Obviously, one can't pray one's self onto a throne. My chief holds identical views."

"The Russian ambassador?"

"Yes, old Prehlen. You know him, no doubt?"

"I have not that pleasure."

"It will come in time. His excellency goes everywhere. At present he has a cold," and Nicholas chuckled.

"Are you going to Lady Threpps's dance?" Walter asked, anxious to quit the contemplation of his tantalizing inheritance.

"I did not know she had one. I daresay I shall go. Of course you are."

"Yes, I am going. I don't much care about those things; but it looks so bad for a man not to go to his own embassy."

"Well, you won't enjoy it," said the blunt young Russian. "Lady Threpps is an absurd creature. She is awkward, and says foolish things."

"I believe you know the Framlinghams?"

"Yes," said Fersen, somewhat grudgingly for so frank a man.

"I saw you dining with them the other night at Jervis's. Lord Mendril is staying with the Threpps. He and I were gre—were friends up at the university." Walter could not get himself to say that he knew only Lord Mendril. But he went gingerly over thin ice. "Lady Framlingham is a Frenchwoman, I believe?"

"I believe so."

"She is very charming. I like her husband. I confess I am peculiar in that; generally, he is most unpopular."

"I have never noticed anything of the sort," responded Fersen, now as cold as the coldest part of his native country, and as far away. "All his friends—and I have met a good many—speak most warmly of him. You are the first man I have ever heard do the contrary."

"You altogether mistake me," exclaimed Walter, flushing with righteous indignation. "I merely state the fact. He admits as much himself. 'Sadler,' he said to me only a few days before I came away, 'how is it I am so hated?' I pooh-poohed the notion. 'My dear Framlingham,' I said, 'I think you make a mistake. You have a great name in the country. You have been

a faithful public servant. Not a man but knows your probity and praises it.' But do what I would, I could not convince him."

Fersen was yawning. Our hero trusted most sincerely that he had not attended to a single word. And as he wiped the perspiration from his brow, he wondered bitterly how in the world he had descended to such paltry and contemptible lying, so foreign as it was to his nature.

"Their daughter is very pretty."

Nicholas cleared his throat, no doubt to avoid anything more explicit.

"Very pretty indeed," Walter persisted, with growing audacity. "If I were not so poor, and a commoner, I should like to go in for—I should like to mar—to propose to her."

Nicholas Fersen treated him to an unflinching stare. "Tell me, Monsieur," he asked, still quite courteous, but portentously solemn, "is it the custom in your country to treat a lady's name so lightly?"

"I am not aware that I have treated her name lightly," snarled Walter; "and, for another thing, my country is France."

"Where gentlemen are quite as well-behaved as they are in England."

"Or Russia," sneered our hero.

"Or Russia. Madame Prehlen beckons me—adieu, Monsieur."

This bitter humiliation was wellnigh the last straw. Even were he plain Walter Sadler, what did this cub mean by treating him so insolently? He was every bit as good a man as Fersen, or that puppy Mendril. His mind was a perfectly correct one; all his feelings in absolute good taste. Surely they must see that he was their equal. But they did not, and needed teaching. In his heart he knew exactly how the lesson should be given. The icy sarcasm, the bitter monysyllable at the right moment, the distant look,—how often had he rehearsed them all. Alas, when the time came, he blundered into quite a different method. He tried to be easy and familiar.

He resolved not to risk any more snubs that evening,

so he quitted what Madame Verre could have called the dazzling scene. His brougham was nowhere to be found. He started forth on foot, not sorry to walk home through the delicious night. The Café de la Paix tempted him to enjoy it more in detail. He sank into a chair and ordered himself a *bock*, of all things in the world, to calm his spirits. Two men were conversing at a neighbouring table; one in earnest tones, not much above a whisper; the other lightly, but no louder.

"Shall I tell you something?" the nearer one was saying in a mysterious undertone; "there is a whisper about that Victor is in Paris."

"My dear Delaforce!" protested the other.

"A man the very image of 'Plon-Plon' has been seen continually of late in the streets near the Gare St. Lazare. Who can he be but Victor? Take my word for it, Jacques, there is mischief on foot."

"Pooh," returned Jacques, puffing out a series of blue smoke-wreaths, and pausing in his words to watch them mount and expand and vanish. "The lamented creature was not a man of a peculiar type; his pasty, puffed-out face is common enough. I do not know Victor; but I dare wager he is no more like his father than you are."

"Wait. The same man has been seen hanging about the Rue Fabert, the other side of the water."

"Well?"

"The Count de Morin lives in that street. A Greek who does some work for the old fellow told me on the Bourse that he has constantly seen this 'Plon-Plon' hovering outside De Morin's door."

"How can he possibly know that this is the man seen about the Gare St. Lazare?"

"Petrophorous lives in the Rue de Berlin," Delaforce answered, evidently delivering himself of his trump card. "He declares 'Plon-Plon' lives there too."

"All I can say is, he'll get short shrift if Carache catches him. The Premier is not in the mood for pretenders. I was in the Chamber this afternoon through that scene between him and the Radicals: he looked as though he would like to have shot Verre."

"I say, Jacques," said Delaforce presently, in a voice a man generally uses to convey some sudden discovery,—  
"I say, Jacques!—suppose this fellow wasn't Victor after all?"

"That's very likely," murmured Jacques.

"Suppose he were the mysterious Bonaparte come to claim his own!"

Walter's *bock* went crashing to the floor. Neither of the two men took the least notice.

"Delaforce, you are mad about those precious Bonas—"

"Hear me out. This De Morin knows more about the missing man than he chooses to make public. Thence my theory. Plon-Plon number two has lived till now in happy ignorance of his name, probably in Paris itself, and constantly seeing De Morin. One day, an old letter or something of that sort discloses to him his secret, as well as the fact that De Morin alone knew it."

"Comic opera, my dear fellow."

"He is now hovering about De Morin's doorstep without the courage to go in and find out what may be the meaning of his little game."

"I do not understand you."

"It is quite simple. The fellow knows enough of his secret to know that De Morin alone can substantiate it. 'Why has De Morin kept me in ignorance all these years?' he asks himself. The only possible answer is, that the latter is acting in unmitigated bad faith,—probably embezzling moneys."

"The whole idea is balderdash. In this world of weak, lethargic, cowardly human beings, there, nevertheless, isn't one weak or lethargic or cowardly enough to sit quiet under a secret like that. No, not for a thousand De Morins. Why, man, he only has to look round to see how the chance is shouting for him. He would have been across De Morin's threshold much ere this and given that aged conspirator a nasty one on the head. If you are right, all I can add is, that De Morin can't have done him so much harm after all. He may have deprived him of a few dividends; he certainly won't have kept him out of his throne. Such a creature—but come, Delaforce; I



am tired of sitting. Let us go and see whether Marie is back from her supper-party. I have not set eyes on the damsel for days."

Walter rose at the same time and resumed his road homeward. He could see no way out of the perplexities which hemmed him in. The marvellously acute Delaforce had stated the truth with a simplicity of which Walter's own overweighted brain was quite incapable. The poor, much-puzzled young man went through the well-worn dilemma for about the thousandth time.

That he was not the coward that Jacques had said, was amply proved by the fact that he continued in Paris, moving about quite openly—not so safe an occupation, as the Petrophorous incident showed. Many a less courageous man might have fled, or at least lurked at home daily against the coming of night. Not he.

But assuredly such a course was absolutely illogical? If he did not fear the chance of De Morin seeking him out, why did he fear to seek out De Morin?

The difficulty presented itself only to be at once dispelled. The Count, having heard Brisson's story, might very well be under the impression that Walter had gone upon his way without suspecting. And so long as this impression lasted, the old vagabond would probably take no steps.

And then the ever-lurking suspicion returned, that he was not the Prince after all; and that De Morin would receive him with nothing more terrible than shouts of laughter. The thought soothed his troubled brain. It gave him a few minutes' respite from the torturing reflection that the throne stood ready for the first serious pretender,—a consideration which, it may be added, was always the more bitter, when he remembered his present life of daily snubs.

The next morning brought a winning appeal from Madame Verre. As Monsieur Sadler, wrote the gifted lady, was intending to call at the embassy, would he kindly inform Lord Mendril that the latter's mother desired him to go down to the Villa Henriette in order to see whether the housekeeper there had obeyed Lady Framlingham's instructions? The poor fellow had no

choice left him but to obey. His charming namesake had had one ear; and now he must present the other. He put off the evil moment as long as possible, hence it was past noon before he entered the courtyard of Lord Threpps's residence. Mendril had just returned from his ride, and presented himself in the course of some nineteen minutes, still booted and spurred, with flushed face and disordered hair. He waxed gloomy the moment he learnt the identity of his visitor, merely touching the other's outstretched hand. Then he flung himself languidly into an easy-chair and commenced to tap his heel with his whip. Walter floundered through Madame Verre's message. The semi-jocular mode of delivery which he adopted to preserve the lady's little precisions proved unavailing. Walter Mendril heard the recital out with a frowning face, adding not one word when it was finished. He listened in moody silence to Sadler's desperate attempts to pass on to an easy conversation, until the latter desisted from the hopeless task, giving his mind instead to devising a pretext for an immediate departure. But these are not to be had for the asking, so he was driven before long to say abruptly:

"I must be going. As it is, I have taken up too much of your time."

Mendril did not move. "I presume you still have something to say to me?" This with a nearer approach to downright insolence than he had as yet been guilty of.

"Of course how foolish of me; I was nearly forgetting," laughed the other, hysterically. "The fact is, Lady Threpps has omitted to send me a card for her dance."

"It is very wrong of Lady Threpps."

"No, no; merely a mistake — some must be accidentally left out."

"Oh."

"The matter is not one which I should take very much to heart," Sadler pursued; "I don't care for dancing or that sort of thing, only it looks so bad for a man not to go to his own embassy."

"Certainly."

"So very bad. People say such unkind things."

"They do."

"And the report spreads that he is not received by the best people at home,—the *very* best, I mean."

"Which may perhaps be true,"—spoken however too low for Walter to hear.

"And that, of course, is fatal to his chances."

"Of course."

"Accordingly, I have ventured to come here this morning—to come here this morning and see whether—whether—"

"Well."

"To ask if you would be kind enough to get the error rectified."

Mendril was on his feet even before the words were out of Walter's mouth. The dear fellow did not seem in the least excited, only very, very decided; and decision, as we all know, does better on straight legs.

"No, no, Mr. Sadler," he cried, "I *never* do that"; the lad might have been fifty, and engaged half his life in refusing similar requests. "Never! never! It's one of my iron rules."

"I am very sorry," murmured Walter.

"Never! never! If a man gets a name for that sort of complaisance, he may make up his mind never to have another quiet moment. The merest acquaintances, men with whom he has exchanged perhaps half a dozen words, will think it their right to pester his life out. The poor devil might drown himself at once; he would, at any rate, be spared a deal of misery."

"I am very sorry," repeated Walter, as indeed his face showed eloquently enough. "I had no idea that you had such a strong objection."

"The strongest objection," returned Mendril genially. "Consider the terrible responsibility. If one gets a man an invitation, one vouches for his being a respectable person;—that he won't insult the ladies, or become intoxicated, or go off with the spoons, or do any of the terrible things invitation-hunters usually do. But how can one possibly answer for a chance acquaintance, whom one hardly knows by sight? Take your own case for instance. I have seen you two or three times up at Ox-

ford, and once since. I don't know you at home,"—this with a significance which, at any other time, Walter could hardly have failed to notice,—“I don't properly know who you are or what you are. How can I then vouch for your respectability?”

Even the worm will turn at last. “For the third time, I repeat I am sorry,” cried Walter, with blazing eyes. “You may be sure I did not understand your feelings on the subject, else I should not have put you to so much trouble—” At that moment the door swept open and Lady Threpps swept in.

Walter, blinded as he was by anger, took her ladyship's measure at a single glance. The ultra-regal air, the excessive languor, the too-well-fitting dress, the overwhelming elegance, all spoke Streatham-on-the-Hill. The ambadress, to be sure, was young, and time might temper her and tone down Streatham into a similitude of Mayfair; but, at present, she was Streatham all over; reeked of Streatham; carried it in her glossy blue-black hair; over her face and neck, so elegantly poised; and on her figure, which, for Streatham, was tall and elegant. Last, but not least, her curiosity was undiluted suburb. The aristocratic repose that lay upon her, and all over her, inches thick, did not prevent her examining Walter very keenly; and she made no pretence to withdraw from the room, which, it is to be supposed, she had only entered under the impression that it was unoccupied.

“So sorry, *dear* Lord Mendril,” she simpered. “I had *no* idea you were in here.”

“Please do not go, Lady Threpps,”—she had not evinced the slightest intention of going. “This gentleman is present as much on your account as on mine.”

“So *charmed* to meet any friend of yours, *dear* Lord Mendril.”

“Oh, he is not a friend; that is an honour I fear I cannot claim.”

Lady Threpps took the cue at once. Indeed, Mendril's voice, if not his actual words, could only bear one meaning. Her simpering face at once assumed a look of extreme hauteur. “If you do not know the gentleman,”

she said, surveying Walter from top to toe, "I am sure I do not."

"I know him slightly. We have met about three times before. He has therefore come to me with a complaint against your ladyship."

"Against *me*? *Really* I do not understand."

"He says that you have neglected to ask him to your dance."

There was no need of further explanation; Streatham understood.

The ambassadress showed her intense enjoyment at finding an applicant on such an errand by once again breaking forth into smiles. "So sorry, my dear Mr. —, Mr. —, so *dreadfully* sorry; but I fear, as it is, I have invited too many people, and I could n't *possibly* ask any more. It's a *horrible* bore, yet what *is* one to do? The space is limited; and then one gets into such a *dreadful* mess, if one asks the wrong people. I did something of the sort at my last dance, and Threpps gave me such a *terrible* scolding. So sorry, so *dreadfully* sorry," and with an insolent nod and a hasty resumption of her ultra-regal demeanour, my lady walked herself out of the room.

Lord Mendril prepared to follow. "Before we part, Mr. Sadler," said he, "it may interest you to know that I met Count Fersen this morning in the Bois."

Walter became scarlet.

"I see you take my meaning. Another time, when you are boasting of your English friends, be good enough not to include my people among them."

"Be good enough not to include my people!"—"Be good enough not to include my people!"—the insolent words rung in Walter's ears; the insolent look that had gone with them swam before his eyes; he fled along the Faubourg St. Honoré, mad with rage and shame, but could escape from neither.

There was only one road now! It lay straight across the water to the Rue Fabert. The flimsy pretexts which had kept him hitherto from De Morin's door should serve no longer. They were worthless, utterly rotten; he saw that well enough, now that his mind was clarified



by blinding anger. What man, in the whole world, would put up with such insults—and again and again their memory stung his face—when, in their stead, he could have a throne, and naught but flattery?

And he would have his throne, too, and keep it; and crunch his heel upon the prostrate forms of these arrogant Fersens, Caraches, and Mendrils. "I can come to Paris whenever I choose," my lord had said, in his careless, self-satisfied drawl. We should see, we should see.

Better still. Paris must, first of all, run with blood, so that in the general commotion these creatures might be caught and killed, like rats in a trap. Death was welcome, if it came as the price of such a revenge.

So, on and on he went, at times breaking into an unsteady trot; his elegant clothes disarranged, his hat at the back of his head and almost off, the money jingling in all his pockets, and tie and watch-chain streaming to the winds. Men turned to look at him and thought him mad. They would have deemed him madder still, had they known what it was he sought.

He plunged into the Rue Fabert. The sight of it did not even sober him. He crashed through the common hall of De Morin's house, stumbled up the steep stone stairs, and stood breathless before the old man's door.

Then he paused to collect himself. Heart and head were throbbing. The place swam before his eyes; and, for an instant, he feared him this was death. But it proved merely the effect of undue exertion on a sedentary and somewhat puffy subject. The surging subsided; and Walter was presently well enough to tidy the outward man. He did so very, very slowly. At last there was positively nothing further to be done; he lifted his hand towards the bell. He merely touched the knob with his thumb; he could not press it. Twice he tried to ring,—twice he could not. The old dreads were on him stronger than ever. With a groan of despair he turned and retraced his steps slowly down the stairs.

He halted in the street, and wrestled with himself. He recalled aloud Mendril's biting words. Their memory brought the blood duly into his cheeks. He repeated

them. The scarlet thickened. He gave the strength of his imagination to revive the picture. The picture came. The young lord, handsome and scornful, stood before him almost in the flesh. The rage and shame of the whole business was no jot abated. But—but he could not turn and re-ascend the stairs.

He crossed the road; and on the opposite pavement started a fresh rehearsal of the late incentives. Had he turned his eyes at that moment up to De Morin's window, he would have seen the curtain twitched aside to make way for a face which smiled somewhat ironically down on his. But he did n't look; and presently the curtain fell back into position.

"Be good enough not to include my people," said he, copying Mendril's voice and gesture; "be good enough not to include my people."

The sting had gained from constant repetition. It dragged him back, step by step, his fears disputing every inch, to the nearer pavement. It drove him slowly, oh! so slowly! into the common hall, and forced him up the steep stone stairs.

De Morin's flat was at the top. The nearer Walter approached the stair-case skylight, the more his reluctance increased. He never actually stopped, but he went so slowly he hardly seemed to move.

The last step but one! the next, and he would be upon De Morin's landing! Once again, had he not been so self-absorbed, he might have noticed that the front door was moving—quite gently indeed, as though there were some one the other side in wait to open it directly the visitor stood well upon the threshold.

And in truth this must have been the case; for at the moment Walter's foot touched the landing, the door was opened noiselessly by an elderly maid-servant who beckoned him in.

"Enter, if you please," she said; "my master is at home." Her calm voice and stolid countenance hardly suggested conspiracy, nevertheless Walter drew back.

"Come in," she repeated. "It is Monsieur Walter Sadler, is it not? My master is expecting you."

## Chapter IV

"My dear Walter," said the Count de Morin, "I am delighted to see you. It must be years since we last met."

The speaker, who already had both Walter's hands tightly clasped in his, was a venerable gentleman of seventy and upwards, whose still erect figure and scarcely wrinkled face bore witness to an old age free from care. His whole appearance betokened a benign placidity. He had two snow-white tufts of hair, one above either ear, between which the crown of the head rose into a conical point—not obtrusively conical, be it said—quite bald, and very shiny. He had a smooth-shaved face and diminutive, almost childlike features; he had small eyes, of some colour which was indeterminable, they twinkled so. And altogether he looked as safe and respectable as the Bank of England. His clothes, too, could not but inspire confidence. They were of an old-world cut. The snow-white frill which he was forever intertwining with his fingers,—that is, when he was n't curling out his tufts or pointing his shaggy eyebrows; his silver-buckle shoes, which called for black silk hose, but did n't get them; the ample folds of his rich black broadcloth—ah, that man would be indeed an unbeliever, who, seeing these things, still doubted the rectitude of their possessor! Walter gave in at once. The memory of his recent suspicions sent the blood mantling to his cheeks. He returned De Morin's hand-shake with equal warmth; it was the most cordial grasp vouchsafed him for many a long day.

"Welcome, welcome, my dear child," repeated the Count, still holding him tight, but putting him also at arm's-length, the better to survey him. "You have not

changed at all. The same intelligent, well-dressed, well-cared-for young fellow I recollect so well. A wee bit thicker about the chin, perhaps," he added critically, "nothing more. Brisson, I told you our young friend would turn up in time, did I not?"

The room was rendered dark by heavy hangings and a quantity of cumbersome and antiquated furniture. But Walter, hearing this name, peered over De Morin's shoulder till his gaze lit upon the Colonel's gaunt figure, half hidden by the shadow of a black oak cabinet which stood against the window. "Sit you down, my dear child," the kindly old fellow rattled on; "no, not there, like a poor relation; but here, between Brisson and me—you know Brisson,—Colonel Brisson of the Engineers. Brisson, I told you our dear boy would turn up sooner or later."

The gallant officer, who was evidently busy all this while keeping himself under some great restraint, bowed without speaking. His face was as long drawn and depressed as ever. And having made his bow, he turned this melancholy visage to De Morin, in obvious expectancy. He remained standing.

"Come, Brisson, seat yourself. No ceremony here, I beg," cried the Count, a little testily as it appeared to Walter. "Now, dear child, some of your news. How goes the bar, hey?"

The young man was utterly bewildered by this gushing reception. "I have given up the bar," he said vacantly; then, with more warmth, "I hate and loathe its very name. I have abandoned it forever."

"Now that is extremely curious," said De Morin, turning to Brisson, who was seated on the very edge of his chair, and watching Walter with uneasy eyes, "very curious indeed. Here's this dear boy as clever as they are made, with heaps of brains, and a great talker, I'll be bound; and yet he hates the bar. Really, it reminds me of another young advocate practising here in Paris, also a dear friend of mine. He took to writing novels, and attended his place of business about once a month. He assures me that finally he came to dread going near the place, sneaking down there as though it were *another*

establishment with—with—offspring. He is a most immaculate young fellow, and happily married besides; and I am quite sure he has never had actual cause to feel the sensation he describes so vividly. So you hate it, hey?" The Count broke off abruptly, and began to feel for his pocket-handkerchief. He found it, and passed it across his eyes, then commenced afresh in tones of subdued sweetness, putting the tears into his voice:

"My dear Walter, I was forgetting. How is your poor guardian? Stop, do not give me that hackneyed answer, I beg. I know it well enough already; and I also know how he is. He is full of joy and happiness and satisfaction. He passes day and night in contemplating the many good deeds performed during life; and his time is perfect peace. He is happy, as you and I shall be, and possibly Brisson here, when we are summoned," and De Morin blew his nose. "You go to mass regularly?" he went on in the same subdued strain; then promptly stifled the question. "Ah, I forgot, you and your dear guardian are Anglican. Never mind, we shall meet in Heaven. Thank goodness, there are no religions there," and the old gentleman said it as if he meant it.

After a decent interval lasting about five seconds, De Morin turned once more to earthly things. "A little more of your news, my dear creature."

"I have no news," Walter responded sulkily. He fancied that he began to see the meaning of these tactics.

"Monseig—the gentleman has not come to talk, but to listen," growled Brisson.

"Colonel, I beg! No news, dear Walter? Surely, you must have plenty. To begin with, how do you like Paris?"

"I like it well enough," came the grumbling answer.

"And the Verres, and Carache, and the rest of your fine friends? And tell me,"—this with a wag of his finger and a twinkle of his bird-like eyes,—“tell me, how long do you imagine all this is going to last on six thousand pounds? You rogue, you! I hear that the Rue de Berlin, forty-seven B, is a positive dream. No wonder you hate the bar.”



Perhaps his—perhaps Monsieur does not mean it to last on six thousand pounds,”—a second growl from Brisson.

“Colonel, I beg!” cried De Morin, in identically the same tone as before.

“Walter, Walter, I shall have to come poking my old nose into that flat of yours, and see that you do not go the pace too fast. Do n’t forget,” he added, with a touch of genuine anxiety; “in a way I am your guardian now. I have n’t mentioned the fact before, because—because you are a trifle too old to need a regular guardian any longer. But always remember that I am the nearest friend, now that our poor, dear, stanch old hero is no more.”

It was the most encouraging thing he had said yet. It moreover gave Walter something of an opportunity.

“For that very reason,” the latter blurted out, “I have come to you to-night.” Colonel Brisson at once brightened up, and seemed sorely tempted to give our hero a little verbal encouragement; but Walter could get no further.

“Of course, of course,” the Count said soothingly; “I knew you would always remember the old days—the dear old days at Harrow. Brisson told me you were in Paris, and about your curious meeting,” and all the time the old gentleman was saying this he kept Brisson under a stony stare, which never varied. “I *do* call it a curious meeting. You, and he, and his dear mother, are my three nearest and dearest friends,—you first; but only a *leetle* way, and then merely because you are the youngest, and still need protection. Well, Brisson told me you were in Paris, consequently I have been living in daily expectation of a visit. I have not had to wait long. Let me see! I returned from Aix on Monday. This is,—one, two, three,—yes, this is my third day at home. If I had n’t been so old a friend,” he cooed, “I daresay I should have had to wait longer; a week or a fortnight at least. You rogue! What, with your Verres and Caraches and Pontécoulants, and your receptions at the Élysée, and your bijou palace in the Rue de Berlin, it’s only the oldest friends who get even a look in.”

Walter glanced across helplessly at Brisson, at last recognizing him as an ally and a friend. And Brisson glanced back helplessly at Walter. But neither could make a way for the other. The kindly old De Morin seemed to be enjoying himself far too much to think of allowing the conversation to become general.

"Now, that's all wonderfully interesting," he continued, without pausing, as though Walter had just completed a long discourse,—“wonderfully interesting. Tell me more—more, my child. When did you first make up your mind to quit London?”

“A little less than a month ago,” very sullenly.

Colonel Brisson, who had been fidgetting all this while uneasily in his chair, could contain himself no longer. Those trifling outbursts, already alluded to as stillborn, naturally afforded him no relief. He now proceeded to deliver himself of an observation, which the usual “Colonel, I beg!” from De Morin, could not manage to stifle. In itself the remark was not profound.

“You should remember, Count”—“Colonel, I beg!”—“No, pardon me, you should remember that Monsieur Sadler has probably many things to ask you,”—and the Colonel looked hard at Walter.

“Yes, truly,” cried the latter, seizing upon this opportunity in sheer desperation, and now utterly careless as to the possible chance of making a fool of himself. “A few moments ago you called yourself my nearest friend?”

De Morin nodded.

“And I—I regard you as my only friend.”

De Morin nodded again.

“You know as much about me as I do myself. While I have known you ever since I can remember.”

De Morin nodded a third time.

“It is not a pleasant thing to be in total ignorance about one's parents,” continued Walter, trying another avenue of approach.

“I quite agree with you.”

“I am sure that it will be within your recollection that I frequently tried to find out from my guardian who my parents really were.”

"Quite."

"And that he always answered that he was not at liberty to tell."

"Which was the fact, I feel certain."

"The week before he died I pressed him again upon this point, and he repulsed me with the same excuse. After his death I went to his papers, hoping to discover therein some mention of my parentage and history. But I could find never a word."

"What a careful fellow he was," sighed De Morin.

"Never a word," Walter went on, waxing a trifle more emphatic; "though I searched his papers through and through from beginning to end, and spent days in looking."

"Possibly you did not get hold of all his papers," the Count suggested, anxiously.

"Oh, yes, I did; Mr Wyse saw to that. I went through all his papers without finding so much as a single word about myself."

"Very distressing indeed, I admit it."

Walter was at a loss how to continue. He mentally rehearsed half a hundred different ways, shelving the difficulty at last by this abrupt question:

"Who am I? Who was my father?"

De Morin became suddenly grave.

"Do you really ask me that question?"

"Certainly, I do. If you know, tell me. I have been ignorant too long."

"I know," said De Morin dubiously; "I know, but—but— Be good enough to repeat your request slowly."

Walter's heart was beating very, very fast under the strain of these preliminaries. "Who am I? Who was my father?" he repeated, this time with a voice that shook.

"Brisson, you hear him?"

"I hear him," growled the ever-candid Colonel; "and I regard your precautions as quite ridiculous." De Morin rose and moved slowly towards the cabinet against which the last speaker had his chair. Unfastening what seemed to Walter an intolerable quantity of locks, he drew forth a bundle of papers, old letters they looked like, mostly

begrimed and yellow with age. His next move was to the door: "Marie," he shouted, his glossy head disappearing for a moment, "we are not on any account to be disturbed. These gentlemen will not stay to supper." The head reappeared, and the body moved towards the table. He seated himself, and with a single twist of his hand undid the bundle so that the papers lay in a scattered heap before him.

And this had been done with the most intense deliberation. Walter felt that, having waited so long, he could afford to wait a little longer.

"Come, gentlemen," the Count cried presently, "seat yourselves. Brisson here, and Walter on my left; that's right—now we are cosy."

"Walter," he began with great gravity, and turning half round in his arm-chair so as to look that young gentleman straight in the face, "always remember this,—what I am about to tell you, is told you solely on your solicitation. If trouble comes hereafter, either to you or to others, mind, no responsibility attaches to me."

"I understand," Walter rejoined.

"That is settled,"—more cheerfully. "Now to business. And, first of all, permit me to remark that our dear friend Brisson here and Madame have considerably discounted the surprise you might otherwise have felt, had you come to me direct for your story."

"Then it *is* true," murmured Sadler; and, strange as it may seem, he felt no particular emotion.

"Yes, it is true," De Morin replied, slightly smiling.

"You are a Bonaparte."

"*The* Bonaparte," cried Brisson.

"*The* Bonaparte, if you prefer it. And may you never regret Walter Sadler."

"My name?"—"Louis Napoleon Bonaparte. Your father was Paul Bonaparte, grandson, by an earlier and an unknown marriage, of the great Emperor."—"Then I am Napoleon's great-grandson?" gasped Walter.—"Yes, I trust it will bring you luck," and De Morin looked dubious.

"My God! how could I have endured Pimlico?"

"There is more honour in store for you," the elder

continued with a grin. "You are my great-nephew. Your mother was a Mademoiselle Zenia, daughter of my lamented wife's only sister. Now for your story." The Count de Morin cleared his throat, threw himself back in his chair to inspect the ceiling, took a deep breath, and so at last began:

"In the December of 1789, Second-Lieutenant Bonaparte, then barely twenty, being at home on leave of absence, secretly married the daughter of an Italian doctor whose family had been for many generations resident in Sartena. Here is the document attesting the marriage. It never quitted Napoleon's possession. He kept it among his scent-bottles: that stain is eau-de-cologne. The sub-lieutenant remained *near* his wife exactly fourteen months. It was a love-match, you observe. A child was born, December, 1790; and twelve weeks later, Napoleon returned to France. He never saw his wife again. And in a few years, when Pauline found that he had gone forever, she migrated with her child to Cremona, whence her family had sprung. She received a handsome allowance on condition that she never attempted to divulge her secret. She obeyed like a sensible woman. Report says she felt not the slightest envy towards either Josephine or Marie Louise. She kept her boy in total ignorance as to his parentage. Dr. Capelli (the lad followed his maternal grandfather's profession, and retained the latter's name) lived his whole life in peace in Cremona, and died in 1840, leaving one son. This son, Paul Lucien Capelli, was your father. Here, if you care to see them, are the certificates bearing witness to these facts.

"Now, my own father, as you doubtless know already, was for many years confidential servant to the Emperor. He alone, of those who surrounded the throne, learnt of this early marriage, and in accordance with his master's orders, handed the story unto me, with this expression of his Majesty's desire—no, do not bother to read it all; there are the important words: 'If the line through the Empress fails, then I direct that my descendants by my marriage with Pauline Capelli, now domiciled in Cremona, shall ascend the throne.' Papa



died in 1834. I was but fourteen years of age; besides, there was no throne to enjoy: it appeared to me that Capelli was happier giving pills to the people of Cremona than chasing phantoms. My trials began when Louis Napoleon became head of the family. Strasbourg threw me into a ferment, quite prematurely, as you can understand. Your father, Lucien Capelli, continued to live on quietly in Cremona with his widowed mother. He had money, and no taste for medicine, and slid into a life of amiable dilettantism, which sometimes roused itself sufficiently to do a little gardening.

“December, 1848, is a great date in the history of your house. Louis Napoleon, who knew your story, sent for me the night he was elected President, and repeated, in substance, what he had said at Strasbourg twelve years before. ‘Your Cremonese family must wait until I, and any son of mine, have done. Should my direct line fail, then the Bonapartes of Sartena may follow.’ Could I be anything else but satisfied,—I, a poor courtier? Unhappily, though I am exceedingly sagacious, I am also a trifle talkative. My wife divulged the secret to her sister, a woman who was as full of ambitions, intrigues, and schemes as some lemons are of juice. This sister (and you must forgive my speaking ill of your deceased grandmother) went to Cremona in 1860 with the deliberate intention of trapping your father into a marriage with her daughter. Cremona is only a small place—suffice to say, her wild project succeeded. How, I cannot tell you; but Madame Zenia was no ordinary woman, while Mademoiselle, your future mother, possessed a face that certainly could not be termed ill-looking. However that may be, the fact remains. Before he was thirty-one, your poor father found himself burdened with an ambitious and discontented wife, and a secret which was to prove his ruin.

“They came to Paris and ordered me to place them upon the throne. I ask you, what could I do? I took what I still think was my wisest course: I brought your father face to face with the Emperor. The latter repeated what he had told me three times already. He consented to make your father an allowance, only stip-

ulating that the matter should be kept the profound secret it still was. Your father, who loved quiet and good living, consented readily. He bought a comfortable house at Versailles; gave out that he was a wealthy Brazilian coffee-planter; and spent his days tending his garden. Madame, however, and that terrible mother-in-law, took the matter less philosophically. Your birth in 1869 redoubled their bitterness, their passionate reproaches. The miseries of 1870 gave them their chance. On the morning of the Empress's flight, this poor fellow, urged on by his women, sallied forth at the head of two footmen, a coachman, and a groom,—all of whom deserted him at the first opportunity,—and made for Paris. At the barrier they strove to capture him unharmed. He set his back to the wall and fought valiantly for his throne. There was nothing to be done but try and wing him, and in the attempt they shot him through the heart. Thus the Empire devolved upon you and another unhappy little boy who was already a fugitive.

"I was busy myself at the time, I can tell you. The government were flattering enough to call for me, alive or dead. At Calais I had to hide for twelve whole days in sight of sanctuary! But to get back to your affairs. It fell to my lot to carry the terrible news to Versailles. And, busy as I was, I placed my very being at the disposal of you and your unhappy mother. My poor wife was good enough to take charge of Madame Zenia. Yes, I was devotion itself. It was a danger for me even to be seen about the streets, but in your service I showed myself a lion. First of all, I attended to your father's burial. You shall visit the grave: Paul Lucien Capelli we have called him on his tomb. Then I carried you and Madame over to England, and deposited the two of you in a dear little cottage at Malvern Wells. From Malvern I went to Chiselhurst, and, I can assure you, proved equally invaluable. I spent that winter and the spring of '71 in London. Being thus, so to speak, half way between both families, I was able to assist either with my sagacity and experience. Your poor mother relapsed by degrees into a state of placid resignation. At any rate, she had you with her; and I need scarcely say that

every week you gave some fresh signs of your later intelligence and high character. But dear little cottages in the country need money to keep them up; and your mother's pecuniary outlook caused me a deal of anxiety. The allowance made to her husband during the continuance of the Empire had ceased with its fall; and, as you know,—or will know, by and by,—one cannot go on indefinitely living upon capital. In desperation I ventured to speak to the ex-Emperor about the matter. I regret to say, the only time I ever saw him smile after his disasters was when I mentioned your poor father's heroic death. But he behaved very generously, all the same. He could not, of course, be expected to continue the old allowance; but he substituted a yearly sum which amply sufficed for your modest ménage, as well as for the amount of education you personally needed at the time—it was n't much. He also appointed me your guardian, with power to delegate my office if I found this necessary. As regards the throne, he informed me, without moving a muscle of his face, that he was not thinking of thrones just then.

“Prince Louis was present at our interview. ‘This is the man you must speak to on that subject,’ said his father, with love in his voice, the love which always came at such times; ‘not to me. He is fated to restore the fortunes of our house; not I,’ and, as I remember, he laid his hand tenderly upon the boy's shoulder. Poor father,”—De Morin here paused to ejaculate with a touch of genuine pathos,—“he paid a very heavy price for Sedan.”

The upshot of it all was that Prince Louis agreed to take his little cousin under his charge. He visited Malvern, and kissed you and petted you, and no doubt looked upon this loving condescension as the first stone in the rebuilding of his Empire. Your mother's cottage stood in the midst of a delightful garden. It was a pretty sight, I can tell you, to see you two children playing together upon the shaded lawn, both of you so helpless, despite the thirteen years that lay between you; both so helpless, and both heirs to the same great

Empire, which no one believed for an instant you would, either of you, ever win back.

"But that was a time when death was very busy in your family. Madame Zenia survived the son-in-law, whom she had assisted to kill, by about three months; and your poor mother took to her bed in the autumn of 1871, and never left it. She died the November of the same year. On her deathbed she tried to make me promise solemnly that I would never tell you your story. Obviously, I could give no such undertaking. But I met her half way. I passed her my sacred word that I would never volunteer any statement upon the subject. Of course, if you asked me point blank, the thing would be different. You observe, I have carried out her instructions to the very letter."

"And acted very foolishly, in my opinion," was the uncompromising suggestion from Brisson.

"I am the sole judge of that," De Morin rejoined with dignity. "Poor thing, her husband's tragic fate had sobered her wonderfully. She dreaded nothing so much as empire. Prince Louis' visits were her dreariest days. Nothing pleased her more than the thought that he was strong and healthy, and might live to have many children. 'My boy needs no throne,' was among the last things she said to me. 'He will be clever—he *is* clever; he can make a name for himself in England.' You were sitting beside the bed, and she took you in her arms and fondled you. Happily she did not suffer much, nor linger. I verily believe that my qualified assurances helped to ease any physical pain she may have felt. I remember, the night she died, she made me repeat them; then passed into darkness with a radiant face. Poor thing, she was not of the stuff queens are made of. Your future now came forward as a question demanding an immediate answer. The ex-Emperor lay dying at Chiselhurst. They could not take you there, even had they so desired. I felt too confirmed a bird of passage to offer my services. I had, moreover, already moved into this flat, and I did not see my way to housing contraband, even in small quantities. Your old guardian stepped into the breach. He had managed your cousin's

English investments—of which there were a good many, I can assure you—for close on twenty years. He was thoroughly upright and reliable; and, as you know better than any one can tell you, benevolence itself.”

“You are right there,” Walter interposed with softened voice.

“Well, the thing was arranged; and it proved the last piece of business the ex-Emperor transacted. You were to pass altogether into your new guardian’s keeping, taking six thousand pounds with you, exactly half of the amount settled a few months earlier upon your mother. I, faithful to the last, carried you to Harrow, and handed you into my successor’s keeping. We agreed that you would do better with an English name,—that among other things, of course, to show you with what thoroughness we managed your affairs. And to show you, furthermore, on what small incidents great issues hang, I may mention that we called you Walter after your guardian; and Sadler, because we happened to discuss the matter in a harness-shop in Piccadilly. You must have passed your baptismal font a million times. From Harrow I returned to Paris with the feeling that I might now rest a while as a good and faithful servant. For near forty years had I been working on behalf of the Capelli branch. And right well, so I considered, had I performed my task. This charming flat received me. I determined that it should serve as the haven of my declining years.

“But God disposes. In 1879—and you must forgive these dates; they are necessary—the English slaughtered the Prince Imperial. To the outside world the headship of the family now devolved upon Prince Napoleon, son of the late King Jerome. It became necessary for me to start my work afresh; to commence, so to speak, once again with Strasbourg. The grass never grows under *my* feet. I started out for England at an hour’s notice to lay these papers before the new Pretender. Plon-Plon,—I beg your pardon, I’m sure, Prince Napoleon accorded me but a doubtful welcome. The late Emperor had been far too fond of me for the Prince to trust my protestations of fidelity and friendship. The latter was polite, but also very, very frigid. My story drove him into a



paroxysm of rage. He declared the thing to be a 'plant'—a piece of posthumous spite on the part of his late cousin. God knew, he did n't want to be head of the wretched family. He wished to heavens that the whole lot of them, except himself, were at the bottom of the Red Sea. He did n't hanker after the throne. All he asked for was to be left in peace. But—but—but he had no intention of being supplanted by a wretched supposititious infant. If the firm was to continue at all, the time had arrived for it to be represented by some one of the blood. But he could not get over the documents. And to do Plon—the Prince this justice, once he felt really satisfied, he showed himself overwhelmed with joy. He wrung me warmly by the hand; told me again and again that I had rendered him a great service; and declared at parting that if only the gods were kind enough 'not to make this little Capelli creature inquisitive,' you, and he and I, between us, would stifle all the life out of the Napoleonic legend, and manage to hand down some sort of peace to our respective descendants. I informed him that, personally I had n't got any descendants. He replied it did not matter; he meant figuratively.

"So I spread your story far and wide. Plon-Plon's children learnt of you, and shrugged their shoulders. They are shrugging them now. 'If Capelli wants the throne,' say they, 'let him fight for it himself. *We* sha'n't fight for him.' Soon every Bonapartist throughout France came to know your history. The Capelli tomb is a sort of minor Invalides. Carache, when he is very angry, sometimes declares that he will have your poor papa exhumed and scattered to the winds. But not a soul, save Brisson here, and Brisson's dear mother, could say what had become of you subsequent to your disappearance from Malvern Wells. Plon-Plon, to be sure, got this much out of me: that you were living somewhere in England, and under an assumed name; and that you were not to be told your history unless you asked for it. That much quite satisfied him. Your advent offered a chance of ending Imperialism for good and all. 'Because one man is an undertaker,' was a favourite saying with him, 'is no reason why his descend-

ants should be undertakers; and neither I nor little Capelli have any desire to be Emperors.' In this way Plon-Plon, who could succeed in nothing, 'not even in dying,' yet went out of life a comparatively happy man.

"It becomes necessary to explain Brisson. And really when I reflect what an unmitigated nuisance he has been in the matter, I find this explanation the most difficult thing of all. I am getting old. I *am* old. My poor wife is dead, blessed be her memory! She is with your guardian, or, I should say, they are both in the same place. I have no son. My only near relative is my nephew Louis,"—and the kindly old gentleman looked across at Walter with great affection. "Accordingly, I entrusted the secret to Brisson, my oldest and closest friend; and Brisson entrusted it to his dear mother because—well, because she is a lady of somewhat decided character, and because Brisson, though over forty and a colonel of engineers, is still a dutiful son. You and I, dear Louis, who are orphans, cannot understand the influence which a strong-minded mother will always exert over her only child. But that is by the way; and I can assure you, my darling nephew, I have had ample cause to regret taking this docile creature into my confidence. From the day he first learnt the secret he has not left me a single minute's peace. Have you, Brisson? To look at him, one would put down eloquence as the least likely of his accomplishments; but you should hear him on 'Walter Sadler.' Couldn't you repeat some of the things for Louis' benefit? Oh, the folly he talked! He declared that I was cheating you out of your inheritance; France out of its rightful sovereign; and the Lord knows whom besides out of the Lord knows what. He maintained that my promise to your mother was no promise; that she had no right to exact it; that I had no right to give it; and that it could not possibly be kept. And once a week regularly, I do assure you, he would rush out of this dining-room, declaring as he went that he intended to go straight to the Gare du Nord and Pimlico. I had one invariable answer. I always told him that he might go, but if he did, I should burn the papers. Yes, he grew quite mad on the subject. He used to see you

at every corner. In the streets he would suddenly clutch my arm, and, pointing to some sandwich-man or cab-driver, shout out that you had come. Hence his unexpected appearance at Aix the other day did not serve to convince me that you were really here. Madame, who, you may have noticed, has rather different views about you, backed up her son's assertion. But I felt convinced that both of them, in their separate ways, had arrived at the same monomania, and I remained incredulous. To satisfy Brisson, I wrote to London. Your landlady replied that you had left for Paris, address unknown. The same day came a letter from Madame Brisson enclosing your card, which she had recovered from the dustbin. After that, of course, further doubts upon the matter became altogether impossible. Another hint as to your doings reached me through my broker, Petrophorous."

De Morin cleared his throat for the peroration. "There, my dear Louis, you have your story as completely as I can give it you. Your destiny henceforth is in your own hands. My task is done. Ah, Brisson, in finding this sole remaining relative, you have lost him to me forever. His fond old uncle, who shielded his childhood and lightened the road of adolescence, must now yield place to an admiring world. The guardian becomes a subject. I lose my nephew; I regain my Prince. Dear kinsman, farewell. Welcome, your Imperial Highness. Brisson, I forgive you."

Napoleon flung away all remnants of Walter Sadler.

"Count de Morin," he said impressively, "I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

## Chapter V

Meanwhile Colonel Brisson stood at attention. "I am waiting," he said, in reply to a question from De Morin, "until it shall please his Majesty to address me."

"My good friend," the Count cried fiercely, "please understand that we Bonapartists do not hold the doctrine of indefeasible divine right. There is no throne in France, therefore there can be no Emperor. Your Highness, am I not right?"

"Something might be said for the doctrine," Napoleon began, pompously.

"It *might*, but it is n't. We do n't split such hairs in France. And now I really must be off to my constitutional. Come and lunch on the 1st of July. Till then we may as well adjourn. There, that is settled. Possibly you would like to walk with me. Mind, no business—indeed, it would not be safe in the streets."

"Thank you, I fear I am too weak-minded to talk or even think of anything save what you are pleased to call 'business.' I daresay Colonel Brisson is of my opinion?"

"Assuredly, Monseigneur. De Morin's task is only half performed. He has told you the past; it remains for him to help you consider the future."

"There is no future."

"At least we two can get to work at once," Brisson went on, unmindful. "The Count can join in, directly he returns. We could sup here, and sit on till a very late hour: well, De Morin?"

"Absolutely impossible. Marie has the evening off: there can't be any supper here to-night."

"Perhaps his Highness will accompany me to the Rue du Bac?"

"I shall be delighted."

"Your dear mother may not prove over-amiable," De Morin interjected, with a malicious chuckle.

"I forgot. There remains my apartment in the Rue de Penthievre. Monseigneur's homeward road takes him past the gates."

"Admirable. Let us drive there at once."

De Morin glared at the two of them, virtuous indignation writ large on every feature of his mobile face.

"Colonel Brisson, I am ashamed of you. The barracks! Why not the Prefecture at once? Really, did I not know you, I should commence to doubt your good faith."

"What do you mean?" shouted the worthy Colonel, his face, his whole frame, working like some volcano before an eruption. "What do you mean, you—you—"

Monseigneur, who was really doing uncommonly well, calmed him with a gesture full of dignity and grace.

"I would accompany Colonel Brisson anywhere," the Prince said sternly. "My dear Colonel, you have forgotten my own abode in the Rue de Berlin. You shall come home and sup with me. We can have a busy evening all to ourselves over my affairs."

The faithful fellow made his usual answer—a deep bow eloquent of intense devotion.

De Morin meanwhile had drifted back to his former seat by the table. "I suppose I shall have to forego my constitutional," said he, making a plaintive attempt at humour. "It must not be said that I failed my master the very first time he directly demanded my poor services," and he gazed across at Napoleon with an affection which said quite plainly, "I wish to heaven my dear master had stayed and perished in Pimlico."

He next proceeded to smile viciously at the hand-bell which stood at his elbow. "Marie," he said, "these gentlemen *will* stop to supper. Now," he continued after the servant had withdrawn, "to business, my friends, if you please"; then, sinking his head onto his arm, he relapsed into sullen gloom.

"I could not have come at a more propitious moment," Napoleon began.



"Indeed, no," rejoined Brisson. "France has only to hear your name, to offer you the throne. I have told De Morin so repeatedly."

"Everything helps to confirm that view. I do not mind confessing I have kept eyes and ears open during the last few days. The man in the street is waiting for me."

"I disagree altogether," snarled De Morin. "The psychological moment—if it was ever with us—has gone by. January, yes; your highness *might* have done something. Since then, however, things have righted themselves. The chance possibly never existed at all; it certainly exists no longer."

"De Morin, you are wrong,"—from Brisson.

"I can only say you ought to have summoned me in January."

"You forget my promise to your mother."

"The Emperor has no mother," the Prince exclaimed grandiloquently, regretting these foolish words the instant they were uttered.

"That may be as it may," De Morin sneered. "The one incontrovertible fact remains—the time has gone by."

"De Morin, you are wrong,"—from the warrior in the corner.

"If you were to declare yourself to-day, you would be laughed at. Carache would merely send a couple of gens-d'armes down to the Rue de Berlin with orders to effect your arrest. Believe me, not a soul in Paris except Brisson perhaps, and of course myself, would dare to raise a finger in your defence. The two of us might, and no doubt would, fly to the barricades; but what are two against gens-d'armes? Brisson and I would be compelled to surrender. What comes next? I cannot predict precisely. In all probability nothing worse than expulsion. So much for his Imperial Majesty Napoleon IV!"

"You are wrong; you are wrong," Brisson vociferated, growing quite voluble with excitement. "There never was a more fitting time. One has only to walk about the streets to see it."

"You and his Highness have sharp eyes," sneered De Morin.

"We are not intentionally blind,"—from Napoleon.

"Everywhere I go," Brisson continued, "I hear the same thing. Not a man but agrees that the time is ripe for a *coup d'état*, while most appear to regret that there is no pretender handy to make one. This feeling prevails especially in the army. I am a soldier; De Morin is n't. Surely I must know better than he."

"I have yet to learn that one battalion of engineers constitutes 'the army.'"

"Your Highness knows what I mean. I repeat, there is not a private through the length and breadth of France who is n't sick to death of the Republic. We want Alsace-Lorraine back. What good are twenty-seven years of work and study, if we are not to use it? We want Alsace-Lorraine back. And we shall never get it while this wretched Republic continues."

"We should never have lost it," murmured De Morin, "were this 'wretched Republic' a little bit older."

"We should never have had it to lose, were the Republic older still," Brisson rejoined, surprising himself and every one else with his knowledge of history. "No, no; a dictator won it, and only a dictator can recover it. If little Mesnil were to capture it for us, he might be Emperor half an hour later. Believe me, Monseigneur, the army will side with you to a man. As for Paris—well, you have not been three weeks in Paris without learning for yourself how far the Parisians will go, provided they get the chance."

"And I maintain exactly the contrary. My dear Brisson, you entirely misapprehend the real significance of the present disquiet. So far from making for a dictatorship, France is steadily drifting away even from such authority as a republic can supply. Socialism is the next change we shall have to look forward to, not empire. Believe me. I am a profound student of politics, and always have been since my father's death. In 1848 I was in the thick of things; I saw the *coup d'état* of '52 from a second-floor balcony in the Place Vendôme, and nearly got my nose carried off by a stray bullet. Peo-

ple were indifferent then, and your Highness will add that they are indifferent now; but take my word for it, their present indifference is of another kind. I cannot tell you how or why; but you will discover the fact quickly for yourself should you be fo—, silly enough to follow this great goose here. He knows that I am right. In his heart of hearts he knows it, only he dare n't own up. The army, above all, is honeycombed with socialistic treason."

"I deny it," cried Brisson fiercely. "You have no right to tell such an infamous lie."

"Tut-tut, you are not loyal to the Republic. Why should the rest be?"

"I don't understand you. I don't understand your long harangue, and I don't want to. I daresay you do not understand it yourself. But I know this, there is n't a word of truth in it from beginning to end. Not a single word. What you say about socialism and anarchy proves that you are wrong. A minority of discontented failures will be able to throw the country into disorder if the Republic lasts much longer. Why? Simply because decent people are for a dictator."

"You talk like a child. You cannot argue; and it is impossible to gather from your words what it is you mean."

"Bah, I have had enough of your rudeness. Monseigneur," turning with a very changed demeanour to Napoleon, "you only need show yourself, to be hailed as saviour of society."

"Brisson, you do his Highness no service to say such things."

"I presume his Highness desires to hear the truth."

"If it were the truth."

"It is the truth," flashed Brisson. "You know it as well as I do. You have some purpose of your own to serve by this."

"You are childish."

"You are dishonest."

The Count shrugged his shoulders. "After all, it is for the Prince to decide."

Napoleon looked immensely wise and cleared his throat.

"Then, De Morin, you think that I ought not to make an attempt?"

"I say it with great regret,—no!"

"Never?"

"Not at present, nor until and unless things change very much from their condition at this moment. And that will be a long time, I fear."

"And what do you propose I shall do meanwhile?"

"You can go on living quietly in the Rue de Berlin. Brisson and I alone have your identity: be 'Walter Sadler' still to the rest of the world. And the three of us will employ our spare time watching for the psychological moment."

"You say it will never come?"

"It might not; still there is no harm watching."

"One cannot go on indefinitely living upon capital," Napoleon murmured with some significance.

"You need have no fears on that score," said De Morin, eagerly seizing what he took to be the other's meaning. "Not the least in the world. Your party will make that all right. I am positive they won't object to anything in reason. Let me see, there is no one at present in receipt of money. No one needs it. Yes, the time is most propitious for a pension. I daresay I could procure you thirty thousand francs or so. Thirty thousand francs a year," De Morin repeated, coaxingly; "twelve hundred pounds a year! Surely that is ample for any man. Many a prince in Europe gets less. African princes, I understand, have no civil list, but subsist on voluntary contributions."

"Yes," conceded Napoleon, "I should be content with that."

Brisson stared from one to the other in mute astonishment.

"You would n't consent to live in London, I suppose?" hazarded the Count.

"I will never again put a foot on English soil."

"I see. I quite understand. Pray forgive my asking. But I was bound to do so; we shall be compelled to tell the party a little about you; hence more may leak out than we had originally intended. Of course if the

authorities get wind of your whereabouts, you will be promptly expelled. Your Highness understands that, I suppose?"

"Of course, of course," Napoleon faintly rejoined. He certainly did not bargain on having to leave the Rue de Berlin.

"Vienna, Rome, Florence, Washington, Berlin?" enumerated De Morin; "none of these names tempt you? They tell me Tokio has become very gay since the war; thirty thousand francs would go a long way in Tokio."

"I do not want to leave Paris," pleaded the Prince. "Besides, how can I watch for the psychological moment unless I am on the spot?"

"There is the 'Lord Warden' at Dover—ah, I forgot, you won't go to England. Well, I daresay it is already engaged. I have it!" he cried, ending up with a brilliant idea; "what do you say to Brussels? It is in every respect exactly the same as Paris without being so draughty."

"I do not want to leave Paris."

"Paris is merely a prejudice, my dear nephew. You will soon get to like Brussels just as well. Then you have the advantage of being near Victor."

"I do not want to leave Paris," reiterated his Highness with a monotony that was truly pathetic. "I do not want to leave Paris. I have got my place in the Rue de Berlin; I have furnished it and made it pretty and cosy, and—and—and—why should I leave it when I am beginning to be so happy?"

"We can move your furniture; Hadamard will do that for you,"—De Morin soothed him.

"But it is not only my furniture," Napoleon returned, mindful of the growing horror on Brisson's face. "I don't want people to think that I am abandoning my pretensions. They will say so, if I go to Belgium."

"You would n't care for Geneva?" coaxed De Morin, making a last attempt. "In Geneva you will be within twenty minutes' walk of France—ten minutes by steam train. You have there a fine theatre and shops and mountains—and a lake, I believe. Make it Geneva, and I will come and help install you."



"I do not want to leave Paris."

"Well, well, we must see what we can do. I shall have to inform the 'Party' that you have decided to await the psychological moment, and would meanwhile like an allowance. I need not say more than that,—save to a trusted few,—though, I warn you, *that* much is risky. The 'Party' may very possibly refuse to contribute without first seeing you. At any rate we can but try. If we fail, we fail."

"Thank you; you are indeed good and kind. The allowance will, of course, be—"

"Paid quarterly? Most assuredly it will."

"I hardly meant that. I intended to ask, rather, whether—whether there would—be certain—in fact, fixity of tenure, to use a term borrowed from the English law," and at the same time smiling with much frank, unaffected sweetness. A fresh sight, at this point, of Brisson's agony cut him short.

"But are you quite sure it would not be wiser to declare myself at once, and make a bid for power?"

"Quite sure. I have been guarding your interests now for sixty-three years. You are my nephew. Rest satisfied that I would not deceive you. I shall watch—make your mind easy on that score; I shall watch, without relaxing my vigilance for a single instant. And when the moment comes,—if ever it does, a point on which I am not over-confident,—you shall receive immediate word from me. I should be only too glad to be able to say, 'Proceed, and God bless you!'"

"I know it. You will attend to this—this little money matter as quickly as possible. I have plenty to go on with; but, naturally, I should like to feel as secure as I could."

"Without an instant's delay; trust me. I will meet the party to-morrow night, and will come round directly afterwards to the Rue de Berlin. Never fear, I shall bring good news."

"It would be a serious thing for me, were they to refuse," Napoleon said nervously.

"Do not be afraid."

"I am not exactly afraid, but—"

"Your Imperial Highness cannot be in earnest?" Brisson shouted, so suddenly that the Prince nearly leapt out of his chair.

"Colonel Brisson, I do not understand you," in very faint tones indeed.

"Do you really mean thus to sell your birthright for a paltry annuity?"

"Brisson, Brisson, you are so violent," interposed De Morin. We *must* proceed with caution. You, a soldier, and not know the dangers of overhaste!"

"Overhaste indeed! Monseigneur, you are letting a chance slip by such as you will never get again. De Morin is comfortable, and he does not want to jeopardize what he has got. He is well aware that he would not be able to keep his fingers out of any conspiracy, so he prefers that there should not be any conspiracy at all. All right, De Morin; you need n't frown at me. I have only said what is the truth."

"I am satisfied that the Count's advice is absolutely disinterested."

"Your Highness never made a greater mistake in your life. De Morin thinks of no one but himself."

"Brisson, you are insolent."

"And you are selfish. You are worse than selfish; you are untrue to your trust. Why did you preserve the secret, if you only meant to fail it at the eleventh hour? You are prepared to let this poor young man forego the best chance he is ever likely to get, for no reason except that you may not be disturbed. Do not take any part in the attempt, if you are frightened to lose all your pretty things. But, for heaven's sake, do not hinder us. No, of course you are not capable of anything so unselfish,"—this last with deep scorn,—"you would be in a terror lest we might succeed; and then you would not be there to divide the spoil."

"Colonel, I beg!" cried De Morin, reverting to his usual remedy, this time, however, without the least effect.

"You may beg as much as you like, you old dog-in-the-manger."

"Colonel!"

"None of your high and mighty airs with me, sir. I adhere to every word I have said. You are deceiving his Highness, simply because you don't want to sacrifice your comforts. Own it! Apart from that, you are willing enough to confess that the time is ripe."

"I will own nothing of the sort. You always were a violent fellow; and I am truly sorry that I ever took you—or your mother—into my confidence. This is your gratitude! Really, I feel tempted to call you a serpent."

"Call me a serpent, if you fancy it will give you any pleasure," Brisson shouted fiercely.

Napoleon gazed helplessly from one combatant to the other. "What *am* I to do?" said he. "I am absolutely powerless in your hands; it will be a terrible thing if you begin to quarrel. Please, please try and place yourselves in my position. With the strongest will in the world, I can do nothing at this moment, save suffer you two to lead me. I have only just arrived from England. I have no real knowledge of the actual state of things in this country. Consider, too, I did not know my great position half an hour ago! I am bound, absolutely bound to rely on others,—that is, of course, for the present. It will be different by and by."

De Morin answered with great docility. "Brisson and I comprehend this perfectly. Our keen desire to give you the best advice is the very reason why we wrangle. During the twenty-five odd years we have known one another, I do not remember ever having called the dear fellow a serpent. To-day is absolutely the first occasion. Isn't it so, dear Brisson? I cannot help feeling very strongly in this matter, my view is so obviously the right one."

"Your view is utterly and entirely wrong," Brisson burst out, still at fever heat. "I do not call it a view at all, seeing that you do not even believe in it yourself."

"Oh, I think he does; I really think he does."

"Your Highness, he does not. De Morin is as insincere as he is selfish."

"Gently, gently, my dear Colonel," the Count interposed affably, his eyes closed and a seraphic smile playing over his placid countenance, "not so fast. If you

will only wait, you will see that I have a compromise to suggest. It is quite obvious his Highness cannot raise his standard to-night. You admit that?"

"Well?" sullenly.

"Well, let me meet the party to-morrow night, as originally arranged. I can get the allowance voted; and—listen, you old muddlehead—I will gather the general view on the situation, and report to his Highness. We might meet here, we three, the following day, say, for lunch, at one. With the views of the party to guide us we might then come to a definite decision."

"You know my opinion about the 'Party,'" Brisson retorted. "No good ever has or will come out of that wretched collection of Jews and busybodies. This much is quite certain: you won't even get the allowance unless his Highness appears in person."

"I have no objection," said De Morin with a significance he could not altogether conceal. Indeed, so far from objecting, he evidently regarded the idea as a capital one. He commenced to grin and rub his hands cheerfully together, demonstrating thereby a delight which seemed as impossible of concealment as his covert meaning.

"Not the least objection in the world," he repeated. "Quite the contrary. I am inclined to regard it as an extremely sage piece of advice. It rids me of an unpleasant duty. The party contains some pretty acute members; if I don't produce our dear Prince, a thousand to one they will imagine I want the money for myself."

"I suggest further," the Colonel went on, "that Monseigneur should himself ask them the vital question."

"Better and better! Brisson, I shall rechristen you Solomon."

"If their reply is in the affirmative, you, De Morin, will offer no further objection?"

"That depends on the amount of unanimity displayed."

"It will be a matter of voting."

"I am prepared to consent to that."

"And you are also prepared to abide by the decision of the majority?"

"Certainly."

Brisson turned to Napoleon. "Does your Highness approve?"

"Your suggestions seem to indicate our wisest course."

"It is good of Monseigneur to say so."

"Not at all. De Morin accepts them; accordingly, I do too. I am quite sure no Prince of my—my house ever had wiser counsellors."

Both bowed; De Morin lowest, no doubt to hide his emotion.

"The worst of it is, when the time comes to think and act for myself, I shall find the task all the more difficult. Uncle, you and Colonel Brisson will have spoilt me."

"As to time and place?" the latter interrupted with military precision.

"Oh, the usual hour and the usual place," replied De Morin. "I will send out summonses to-night. We can call for his Highness on our way."

"You need not trouble to come so far out of your road. I shall be in barracks all the afternoon; I can bring Monseigneur."

"It is no more out of my road than it is out of yours," the Count said tartly. "I shall be there in any case—at a quarter before seven, if your Highness will be kind enough to remember."

"Do as you please," said Brisson; and that settled it.

"And now," cried their host, "let us put business to one side." The others were no longer unwilling. So the three spent a cheerful evening, doing justice to the good things which Marie had provided, and increasing generally in their mutual love and amity until the clock warned them that it was getting near De Morin's bedtime.

Brisson offered to accompany Monseigneur; but the Count had a word to say in private to that gallant warrior. Napoleon bade them both a warm farewell, and set forth alone.

He walked upon air, burying Walter Sadler as he went. No wonder Pimlico had stifled him! At home, the first thing he did was to consult his mirror. He had never seen Prince Louis Napoleon!



## Chapter VI

The next evening, punctual to the hour appointed, De Morin and Colonel Brisson appeared in the Rue de Berlin, and carried Napoleon off to meet his adherents.

They drove, "because," as the Count put it with a grin, "it does n't do for our worthy friend here to be seen too much in my company. He is above suspicion, lucky dog; and I am not." To which pleasantry, the other, also in the best of tempers, made reply, "All in good time, De Morin; all in good time. A few months, and not a subject in the Empire but will be proud to show himself with you. What do you say to that?"

Their destination proved to be a third-rate hotel of forbidding aspect, situated in the Rue Boissy d'Anglas. Directly the carriage came to a standstill, De Morin jumped nimbly to the ground; and, leaving the Colonel to pay, led the Prince through a dimly lighted hall and up a narrow flight of concrete stairs. They ascended to a room upon the topmost floor. "Your Highness will kindly wait here a moment," said De Morin. Then he disappeared through a door that led into an inner chamber, whence came the buzz of many voices.

A moment later, the Count's piping treble rose above the rest. "Gentlemen," it said, "the Prince is here." And with no further introduction than that, the missing Bonaparte made his debüt before the world.

The room, a large one, was crowded. No vacant space showed anywhere, save the narrow lane leading from the door to a low daïs at the further end. Yet the silence was so absolute, one might easily have heard the ticking of a watch. It betokened a respect which Napoleon found perfectly entrancing. But it also increased his nervousness. Anxious to acquit himself like a man worthy to wear the purple, fully alive to the value of

first impressions, he, nevertheless, could not take his eyes from off the ground. His first few steps were literal stumbles: his head sank between his shoulders.

"Be calm, be calm," whispered Brisson. The strong voice encouraged him to an effort; and the effort succeeded. His head was no longer suffered to droop. With eyes that now moved slowly over all, but dare stop on none, and firm, self-reliant steps, he advanced up the centre of the room. At the foot of the dais De Morin and Brisson drew back. Napoleon mounted alone and turned and faced his following.

All eyes were turned towards him. Every visage was more or less expectant; while the oppressive silence still continued. What made things worse, the lane by which he had reached the platform had silted up; the room was now one close packed throng of human beings, most of whom were in dress clothes, and very funereal.

The Prince looked across the breadth and down along the length of this formidable multitude, hopeless bewilderment clearly marked upon his not unexpressive face. The front rank was close enough beneath him for him to have touched it, had he so desired. De Morin, in front of all, turned his face up and whisperingly implored his master to say something. But Napoleon, so ready of speech when speech was not wanted, hadn't a single word.

"Gentlemen," prompted De Morin,—"*Gentlemen*," said the obedient Prince; and that one word undid the flood-gates. The danger now was, not that the latter said nothing, but that he might say too much. De Morin was in a fever until the exhortation was safely over.

"Gentlemen,"—this was the gist of it,—"*you have been expecting me for many years. At last I am come. I must crave your forgiveness for having tarried so long. But you know my story, and therefore also know that I am not to blame. Gentlemen, this is not a time for words. And if it were, I could hardly find them to express my gratitude for your presence here to-night. Let me say only this: with God's help and your assistance I will re-establish the Empire.*" De Morin shuddered. "*Yes, I will re-establish the Empire. I am in direct*

descent from the great Napoleon. I pray heaven it may be mine to win back some of the glory which he won for France."

There was a low murmur of applause.

"Gentlemen," cried De Morin, "the Prince desires that I shall present you all in turn"; and in a lower voice, meant for Napoleon's ears alone, "Perhaps your Highness will descend and stand by me."

The proceedings now became truly regal. Napoleon got his first taste of the troubles of royalty. He had to make no less than four hundred consecutive and elaborately distinct bows, and his neck—as may well be imagined—was aching before he had reached the forty-fifth. Not that the ceremony was altogether devoid of amusement. He scanned each individual as he approached, and tried in this way to discover the material of which his party was composed. Most were very old or very young. Those that were middle-aged were Jews. So Bonaparte congratulated himself that the sentiment, enthusiasm, and moneyed brains of France were ranged under his banner. His own demeanour throughout the trying ordeal showed sensible improvement. He was warming to his part; bowing—yea, even to the four hundredth bow—with great natural dignity and entire absence of all self-consciousness.

De Morin did the introducing. His memory appeared to be absolutely marvellous. He straightway named each man as each presented himself, and sometimes threw in a few biographical particulars besides. Everything was done with the least possible amount of noise; "for," he explained, "the landlord sleeps just below; and though he is a stanch Imperialist, he likes quiet."

This somewhat late levee at an end, the inevitable De Morin made a further statement. "The meeting is over. His Highness desires that the Committee will remain."

The lane at once reopened as if by magic. Napoleon passed down it into the outer room. The door was closed behind him, and he was alone. For a moment he expected to hear a burst of uproarious laughter. Brissson and De Morin, he thought, were two among the

leading *farceurs* in Paris; and this meeting was a practical joke—perhaps the subject of some well-advertised wager. But no—not a sound except the soft tread of departing footsteps.

Presently the door was again flung open, and Brisson begged that his Highness would return. A long wooden table had been set in the centre of the room. Round this were seated some thirty or so of those who had taken part in the late proceedings. The Count was in an arm-chair at one end, while at the other, and next to Brisson's chair, stood an empty seat ready for Napoleon. He sank into it, and looked across at De Morin. The other rapped thrice with his knuckles upon the table.

"If you please, gentlemen, to business. No one may speak for more than five minutes at a stretch, or twice within the same half-hour."

A perfumed youth, who was hardly able to speak for his airs and graces, rose and bowed towards Napoleon.

"I propose," he minced, "that the fund originally raised for his cousin, the lamented Prince Louis, shall be resettled on his Highness."

An intelligent-looking little Jew here sprang to his feet. "His Highness is only to enjoy an inalienable life interest," he cried. "The capit—"

"Thank you," interposed the Prince haughtily, "I do not desire to hear more. I have no intention of touching the capital. It irks me to receive pecuniary assistance at all; but you will understand I cannot very well work for my living."

The little Hebrew gentleman looked dubiously at De Morin. Monsieur Felix Hadamard was a member of the great financial house of that name: his words deservedly carried respect.

"The fund," he began anew, "was vested in the hands of three trustees originally. The Count de Morin, here, was one: the other two are dead."

"I have no objection to two new ones being elected."

"I might remark, my own position as a member of the great house of Hadamard peculiarly fits me for a position of trust."

"The question is that Monsieur Felix Hadamard be joined to the Count de Morin as trustee of the Imperialist fund," cried the latter. "Those who approve the motion say 'Aye.'"

"Aye," bellowed Hadamard, meaning to swell a triumphant chorus: no one else uttered a sound.

"The motion is carried by acclamation. Felix, one moment." The two men put their heads together across the table, and spent a few minutes in earnest whispering. "The trustees are of opinion," De Morin exclaimed at last, "that no further appointment is needed. The committee will now proceed to other business."

Monsieur Hadamard promptly rose to his feet. "As to residence," said he. "I should suggest some snug little nest in the Quartier St. Germain."

"He has a flat in the Rue de Berlin," murmured De Morin."

"What's it like?" asked Hadamard with business promptitude.

"So so. It is not furnished quite to my taste; still, it does."

"The china, and glass, and all that?"

"That would be all right. His Highness has only been in Paris a month."

"No cutlery?"

"I should imagine not."

"I am sorry. I have a bankrupt stock of very good dinner knives and forks, your Highness,"—calling across the table,—"you could n't do with some cutlery?"

"I have no intention of leaving the Rue de Berlin," was Napoleon's sole answer, "except to exchange it for the Élysée."

"The Committee applauds so wise a resolution. There is nothing more, Hadamard, is there? We can take an informal inventory in the morning. Your Highness, your trustees will do themselves the honour of calling to-morrow forenoon to discuss money matters. And that concludes our business."

"Stop," cried Brisson, leaping to his feet; "his Highness still has something very important to say."

"I thank you, Colonel," assented Napoleon, faintly.



"Gentlemen, I thank you for your presence and your generosity. But—but—gentlemen, it remains for us to consider how I shall win back my throne."

The surprise, already on every face, now faded into blank consternation. Hadamard voiced the general feeling. "The difficulties of such a task," said he, looking round for approval, "are very great. The risks are enormous. Will not his Highness await in peace the psychological movement? The iron is not red-hot."

"Be firm; be firm for heaven's sake," in undertones from Brisson.

"The iron *is* red-hot."

Monsieur Hadamard indulged in a pitying smile, which effected far more than the soldier's whispered monitions.

"I tell you, Monsieur Hadamard," shouted Bonaparte in a blaze, "the iron *is* red-hot."

"No, no," purred De Morin, "the peril to the Republic is from anarchy and socialism; the one-man *coup d'état* is over. The days of Authority—Imperial or Republican—are ended. I see the handwriting upon the wall!" and he waved one hand towards it, while steadying himself with the other on Hadamard's head. "Felix, surely you see it too?"

"Yes," said Felix, "I see it."

"We both see it—the old familiar line, 'Mene, Mene'—Authority shall pass away from France for evermore. Our country returns to the mountain. Then comes chaos; then the fate of Poland. Englishman and Spaniard, Prussian, Swiss, and Italian, these will divide us. Their boundaries will be planted in our heart. Moulins—famous for its gingerbread—will be the five-cornered frontier; while the isles, the beauteous isles of our western coasts, will probably go to the United States."

"How can your Highness suffer him to talk such fearful nonsense?" whispered Brisson.

"I am obliged to you, Count. I desire to hear what my other supporters have to say."

"Monsieur Hadamard," said De Morin promptly, "you will kindly favour the meeting."

"With great pleasure My advice is—"

"I think I know all Monsieur Hadamard has to say."

"I want particularly to add a word about the psycho—"

"I shall take it as a great mark of disrespect unless you instantly desist. As it is, I do not consider your demeanour at all becoming."

"Oh, I am as God made me," said Hadamard carelessly.

"Colonel Brisson, please, your view?"

"It lies in a sentence. Had your Highness appeared in the spring, your chances would have been better. But—" But in the spring his Highness's days had gone for the most part in Appeal Court I, that whirlpool which seems to catch all who are desolate.

"Unfortunately," Brisson continued, "the chance was lost. But if the opportunity was more favourable six months ago than it is now, it is more favourable now than it will be six months hence. The more quiet people get, the more quiet they want. Seize the hour, Monseigneur, for whatever it is worth. I can answer for the army. The whole Paris garrison is at your disposal—"

"I don't think much of their boots or bayonets," murmured Hadamard. "Both are exceedingly soft. I am sure I have good reason to know."

"You little dev—" began the irate Colonel.

"Peace," interposed De Morin. "Might we not hear Monseigneur's own views? True, he has not had much opportunity of judging, but they are sure to be intelligent."

"I side with Colonel Brisson."

"The result of insufficient data," hazarded the Count.

"I have kept my eyes and ears open, my month in Paris. Everywhere I find signs that the moment is ripe. My own strange coming, ignorant of my name, purposeless, led by some irresistible craving for action, what can it be but my Destiny pointing the road to Empire?"

Brisson touched his elbow: "You are making a visible impression."

This encouragement, combined with his own eloquence, had the desired effect. Napoleon lashed himself into a condition of ecstatic frenzy.

"You shall not hold me back—rather a thousand

times the starvation which sent me here. But your presence testifies to a loyalty and courage which will stop nowhere short of the great reward. Follow me, my friends, and success is ours. Quickly too. The flood-tide is ebbing fast. Let us put off at once before it is too late!"

"Now," sighed De Morin cheerfully, "we will proceed to vote. Those in favour of awaiting the psychological moment say 'Aye'—the ayes have it. *That* finishes our business. The next meeting will be next June."

Napoleon sprang to his feet. "What if I say that I refuse to be bound by the committee's decision? I may or may not make the attempt; it will be for me to choose. But I give the Committee their choice. Those that are willing to follow me at whatever cost, let them stay. The rest may depart as quickly as they like."

"But is Monseigneur really in a position to behave so?" suggested De Morin.

"I alone shall suffer if I act rashly. Come, gentlemen; I give you all your choice."

About twenty-five out of the thirty rose at once and made for the door. Their manner of reaching it varied. Some ran, perspiring freely, as though they had been in deadly peril, and had barely escaped by the skin of their teeth. Hadamard bowed amiably to the Prince, and sauntered out with extreme deliberation. Others sidled up to the exit, as though they merely meant to get clean handkerchiefs from their overcoats. These, like soap-bubbles, began very slowly, to end abruptly. In fine, whatever the manner of their departure, all departed. Even the five who remained with our three friends at the table—they were young men who at the outset looked very bold and devoted—even these, as their isolation became more and more marked, thought better of it. They, too, suddenly remembered that they wanted clean handkerchiefs, so sauntered towards their overcoats and presently were gone.

"Brisson," said De Morin, when the three of them were quite alone, and two of them were very glum and silent, "I understand we dine with you to-night. Come, friend; come, dear nephew; let us away."

And in this manner the Count throttled the subject. A formal decision had been come to, and he did not see why he should go on indefinitely discussing it to the exclusion of far more interesting topics. Napoleon indeed made several attempts; Colonel Brisson made many more; but the benevolent old gentleman burked each and all and sundry with resolute impartiality. And he could do this all the more easily, inasmuch as he walked between his two companions, his arms intertwined lovingly in theirs. He was quite affable—nay, his playful ways rivalled the gaiety of some light-hearted, ingenuous child. He sung, he sparkled, he railed at them for their moody abstraction; he chid their silence, and tried by his own generous flow of spirits to galvanize them into life. He could afford it. He was the victor; and he had ever been a generous rival.

Madame Brisson's urbanity, too, knew no bounds. She accorded the Prince a most respectful welcome. She gratefully recalled the unworthy part her son and she had played in restoring him to his own. She hung upon his words, which, at the outset, were neither very wise nor very plentiful. She would not let him sit under an open window, reminding him of the value of his life, and by half a hundred kindred devices showed him the respect and loyal devotion she felt towards his person.

She was an old lady, not accustomed to unbend, haughty, and with a temperament more often disdainful than otherwise. To-night, however, she displayed all the simple, unaffected graciousness of some young and charming woman, who has a due sense of the great occasion when it comes, but also natural spirits that are invincible.

De Morin came in for a share of her affability. But not so her son. Indeed, so marked was her indifference to his presence, that the Prince felt certain that the quarrel, caused by his own first appearance, had continued and widened as it went. De Morin, with his keener eyes, knew better.

Madame, it may further be remarked, did not want to hear a word about their wretched business. She knew that it had commenced at seven and lasted till past

nine, and she commiserated them; but she showed no sort of curiosity as to the result. When De Morin evinced some little desire to recount his victory, she implored him not to trouble. "Both of you, I feel quite certain, must be heartily sick of the whole matter. Please, no more of it, for my sake." And later, the former having remarked that they had decided on a policy of masterly inactivity, she glanced across at Napoleon with wondrous tenderness, saying in a low voice that trembled under its heavy load of pity, "I trust Monseigneur is not too disappointed."

One could not but be touched by such womanly sympathy. Napoleon was, and speedily forgot whatever chagrin the committee had caused him. Towards the end of supper, he became quite cheerful; the probabilities being that he did n't notice the malicious look that could not keep out of Madame's eyes on one or two occasions.

Such a look accompanied the following simple question: "I trust your Highness's present flat is a comfortable one?"

"Very, I thank you."

"I was sorry," continued Madame, "not to get mine let, I am so anxious to leave Paris. But of course it would not have been suitable for you."

"This is a very good flat," remarked Napoleon, looking critically round the room.

"Yes, it is fairly comfortable; but obviously it would not suit any one who wanted to entertain. Tell me, Monseigneur, does your apartment really repay the trouble you say you have expended over it? Do you not sometimes despair of ever getting rid of that bachelor flavour all bachelors' flats seem to acquire? I am vain enough to think that a woman's taste and judgment are indispensable in these matters. You may command my services at any time: I will give an afternoon with the greatest pleasure. And," archly, "as I am such a very old woman, no one can say a word."

At this point, Madame's son, who had been alternately frowning and yawning all through the entertain-



ment, sprung to his feet and declared that he must be off to barracks.

"Very well, Jean," said his mother coldly; "good-night."

De Morin was stretched full length upon a sofa. "Good-night, Brisson," he cried; "excuse my moving, I am so tired."

Napoleon consulted his watch. "It is late. One moment, Colonel; I will accompany you."

De Morin hurried to his feet; also Madame.

"We shall both be very disappointed if you leave us at this early hour," cried the latter. "Jean has to get back to perform his duties, otherwise he never departs before eleven."

"Indeed, yes, my dear nephew; we can't think of letting you off so soon. We must n't make that great mutton-head, Brisson, believe that his presence is necessary to the vitality of the party. Surely we three can manage a cosy hour or so without help from him. All right, Colonel, you need not wait. His Highness intends to remain."

His Highness did remain; and, with Brisson's restraining presence gone, the conversation became very general and very genial. Madame's offer to come and give a finishing-touch to his apartment was repeated and gladly accepted. And, at parting, she and De Morin, on their side, accepted an invitation for that day fortnight—"an old people's dinner-party," she said, and De Morin laughed.

"I am afraid I can't make the dinner at the Élysée," Walter responded with considerable hesitation, whereupon Madame fell back into her former voice of tender, unobtrusive sympathy: "Never mind," said she; "that will come in time"; and De Morin laughed again.

Uncle and nephew parted company at the corner of the Rue Fabert. "Hadamard and I will be round at your place about eleven," said the former. "The committee were even more generous than I expected. Your income is close on thirty-eight thousand francs a year—that's not bad in these days, is it? Good-night, dear

boy. Pleasant dreams; and, above all, be discreet," Then, when they had actually separated, and there were about fifteen yards between them, "Louis, Louis," cried De Morin, "here a moment." Napoleon returned. "Do n't be down-hearted, dear child. The committee *may*, after all, be more favourably disposed to action next year. The wisest are fallible: I may have erred for once. At any rate we can but hope. Good-night, again. Be discreet."

Arrived at his own door, Napoleon entered without recourse to the bell and passed straight through into the library.

Brisson broke upon his astonished vision—the whole of Brisson, and all at the same time; Brisson reclining in an arm-chair, his eyes shut, and apparently asleep.

"Colonel Brisson!"

"Pardon, Monseigneur," replied that warrior, awaking at once, and composedly rising to his feet. "My thoughts were so far away, I did not hear you enter."

"Do not apologize. Have you been waiting long?"

"I came straight here from my mother's. The servant promised to give you word of my presence."

"Ah, they have all gone to bed. I am sorry to be so late. Had I but known. You see, De Morin is such an amusing fellow. And Madame, too, what a charming woman she is! It is a house where one easily loses sight of time."

"I am glad that you have spent a pleasant evening." Napoleon glanced sharply at the Colonel's face. It was absolutely motionless.

"With your Highness's permission, I will resume my seat."

The Prince followed Brisson's example, not best pleased at the prospect indicated by such a proceeding. He could easily guess the meaning of this visit. Well, if this blunt ungainly Colonel would come and stir up the "low beginnings of content," at least he should do so without delay. Napoleon wanted to have the business settled and dismissed from his mind for—for one year. The first disappointment had been bitter enough,

Heaven knew. In the earliest blush of his unlooked-for promotion, he had panted to mount the throne forthwith. But the Committee and De Morin had said otherwise. So be it! The latter's experience was not to be opposed lightly. It could not be opposed at all without assistance from the former. Accordingly, at this moment, he was in a state of tepid acquiescence: quite determined to make a bid for fortune—next year, when the time and he himself were riper; and meanwhile intending to pass the interval as comfortably as fifteen hundred a year would permit.

"What does your Highness intend to do?" began Brisson abruptly.

"Really—I—I have no choice. I am bound to abide by the decision of the Committee."

"Then you finally abandon all claim to the throne."

"Nothing of the kind, Colonel Brisson; you know better than that. I do n't renounce one iota of my pretensions."

"Does Monseigneur really think, after what he has seen to-night, that the committee will ever counsel action, or, indeed, do anything except talk?"

"A year may effect a change."

"A hundred years would not."

"De Morin says so."

"De Morin says anything."

"You seem to forget my inexperience."

"If I forgot it, I should not be here. I come to proffer my advice simply because I know your Highness's position."

"Then, cannot you see how much I, personally, shall gain from a year's delay?"

"I do not follow you."

"It is simple enough. Twelve months hence I shall be able to judge for myself. More than that, I shall have made friends outside the Party; I shall be no longer dependent on these Hadamards. I can even dispense with De Morin's services, if I choose."

"Well, cannot you do all this to-morrow?"

"The question is absurd. Do you seriously propose that I should descend into the streets, and set up my

banner single-handed? 'Come, good people! here I am, the fourth Napoleon,—the missing Bonaparte! For proof of the same, call on the Count de Morin, Rue Fabert, he will supply documentary evidence and answer all questions. I propose to upset the President. That, to begin with. Afterwards, with your help, I shall restore the Empire. Come, then, in your thousands,'—that's the sort of thing, I suppose," and Napoleon laughed at his own humour.

"I have said nothing that deserves such ridicule," returned Brisson frigidly.

"My dear Colonel, I give you up. I am not to rely on De Morin, Hadamard, and Company; I am not to rely on myself—"

"I never said so."

"Well, on myself alone,—it is the same thing. Perhaps, then, you will tell me, who am I to rely on?"

"Rely on yourself and me."

"You are very kind, but, beyond the fact that you are a soldier and a friend of De Morin's, I know you no better than I do Hadamard."

"Do you doubt my honour?"

"No, no, no. But how can I believe in your sagacity and energy any more than I can in theirs? It's all my wretched inexperience. Surely you see, from this very incident itself, of what immense value a year's watching and waiting would be to me?"

"Of what use the experience without the opportunity?"

"Oh, the opportunity will remain."

"Do not be too sure."

"We must n't be frightened by a bugbear like that. Imagine it to be June of next year. The Committee have given me a second negative. You come to me, just as you have done to-night, with exactly the same proposal. Consider how far more capable I shall be of giving a sagacious answer. By that time I shall know your character and the actual power that you wield.

"By next year whatever power I have will all be gone. You do not suppose that the army will turn against their King?"

"Their King?"

"Yes, the Duc d'Orléans. If you do not seize the present opportunity, he will. As it is, he has the start of us."

"I do not believe you."

"Really—"

"I beg your pardon. I should have said I could hardly credit it."

"Then, do you imagine that he has been idle all this time?"

"Do you actually know of any Orleanist intrigues?"

"I know of several. The army naturally inclines to the Empire, but it prefers the Monarchy to the Republic. The Duke may easily be upon the throne by the end of the year."

"This is De Morin's fault," exclaimed Napoleon petulantly; "De Morin's and my mother's. Poor thing, no doubt she did it for the best; but that fool's clause of hers about having me kept in ignorance has ruined our cause. The Count had no business to obey her. Who gave these relatives the right to play such tricks with the welfare of my family? It is scandalous!"

"No harm has been done, if only you will follow my advice."

"I do not even know what it is."

"Will you follow it?" cried Brisson, his eyes gleaming.

"How foolish you are. I tell you again, I don't even know what it is."

"Listen," cried Brisson in a voice which struck Napoleon as a trifle peremptory; "here is my project: I will introduce you to the leading officers of the Paris garrison. The safe ones first, and afterwards to those who are a bit doubtful."

"Well?"

"The lot of us will agree upon a night, say a week hence, for them to bring their men to my barracks. It is a perfect rendezvous, and one from which we can get to work at once."

"The thing sounds delightfully simple," said Napoleon with a half-sneer.



"It will succeed for that very reason."

"And if it does not?"

"We must be prepared to take the consequences."

"What will they be?"

"The question is hardly worth asking. However, you may make your mind easy on one point,—they will be worst for us."

"Us?"

"Yes, the other officers and myself."

"I do not see that; I shall lose all chance of the throne."

"Not more effectually than if you trust to the Committee."

"I repeat, I should lose all chance."

"You do not seem to remember Strasbourg and Boulogne."

"And you forget Ham."

"Not at all. Did he not escape?"

"My Ham will be far more secure."

"The government can only expel you. We, on the other hand, should have to pay a much heavier price for failure."

"I do not see it."

"We should all be shot."

"And you say that you would have many comrades?"

"Very many."

"Then the Republic could not afford such a wholesale slaughter."

"It will have no choice, at least so far as I am concerned."

He said this with the utmost simplicity, but at the same time with an earnestness there was no mistaking. Napoleon had no reply.

"Of course," continued the last speaker, "if you will only accept my proposals, I can proceed to details. But you understand it is not fair to mention names otherwise."

"Quite so. And suppose De Morin comes to hear of this, what then?"

"You may well ask," replied Brisson gravely. "De Morin has ways and dodges peculiar to himself. He

could easily disclose our whole plot without pretending to stir a finger. He must not know."

"How are we to prevent it? He will be here constantly."

"You have n't yet learnt De Morin. His one aim in life is his own health and comfort. He will be very fond of you, and all that sort of thing; but he won't let your arrival interfere the very least degree with the ordinary course of his existence."

"Well," said Napoleon with the decided voice of a man who needs such an outward prop to stay his purpose, "it is useless to discuss the matter further. I am greatly obliged to you for your offer and the devotion which prompts it, but I cannot and must not entertain it."

"Pray consider—"

"No, I must not and cannot entertain it." And at this point the Prince warmed so much and with such suddenness he seemed transformed into a glow of sympathy and candour. "I absolutely dare not. Your interests, no less than mine, forbid. Tell me, my friend,—and your offer has at last convinced me that you are my friend,—what right have I to jeopardize the lives of a dozen brave men, and fling their homes into desolation?"

"That is our chance."

"Pardon me, it is a deep concern of mine. Take your own case. I owe a duty not to you alone, but also to your dear mother. She is loyal and patriotic, that I know quite well. She would give her life, aye and yours also, to place me on the throne; but your death would break her heart. My chances of success do not justify so great a sacrifice."

Brisson was on the point of making some not over-complimentary remarks about the character of his mother's loyalty. Filial respect, however, stopped him just in time. He compressed his lips and looked exceedingly glum.

"Accordingly," continued Napoleon, "you must take this as my definite answer. The decision is a painful one, but it is given after mature consideration."

"Then you have made up your mind to leave Paris?"

"No, certainly not. Why do you ask?"

"You cannot go on living here. You know that, of course," and Brisson glanced round the room with some contempt.

"Wherefore not, pray? What do you mean?"

"Surely you do not suppose that the government will permit it?"

"The government will not know."

"That is absurd."

"You are very outspoken, Colonel Brisson."

"I merely tell you the truth. De Morin says exactly the same thing."

"De Morin?—I do not understand you."

"This evening, when we were coming to fetch you to the meeting, he remarked that your days in the Rue de Berlin were numbered."

"Did he say that?" cried Napoleon with flashing eyes.

"Yes. He said that, do what one would, one could n't keep police agents out of these gatherings."

"He is an infamous liar. He told Hadamard, in my hearing, he knew every one present."

"That's likely enough," said Brisson, grimly.

"Did he say anything more?" asked Napoleon.

"A good deal. I replied that it would be as well to warn you. He rejoined, you had not been in France long enough for the government to take extreme measures. They would merely deport you across the frontier."

"He is a traitor," cried Napoleon, as vehemently as before.

"He went on to remark that you would be quite as happy in Brussels after a little while. Victor might give you a bed in the Avenue Louise until you got a home of your own, and you and he could enjoy many a little excursion to Mons or Marienbourg."

"I cannot believe such treachery of De Morin."

Brisson drew himself up to his full height: "Do you doubt my word?"

"No, no; but De Morin may have been jesting."

"His manner did not convey that impression. Here is something more. When we were at Aix, I asked him what was to be done, if and after you learnt your secret. He said that you must be introduced to your party, and get them to vote you an allowance. I naturally pointed out the obvious danger. His reply, so far as I can remember, was in these very words: 'Oh, he will soon get accustomed to Vienna or Brussels; and it's far better for him and us that he should n't live in Paris. The anxiety would be unbearable if he did.' "

"I hate him, I hate him. He is an abominable traitor," almost screamed, his Highness. He gazed round the room with fiercely affectionate eyes. Then flinging his arms from him with a gesture of impotent despair, he wildly exclaimed: "I do not want to leave my home!" It was a pathetic sight.

"I do not want to leave my home!"

"Why should you leave it?"

"I will not budge an inch from Paris."

"You need not. Only accept my proposal."

"I accept, I accept!" cried the other wildly. "De Morin is unworthy of trust; I place myself unreservedly in your hands."

Brisson showed no sign of triumph. "You will not repent at the eleventh hour?" he asked dubiously.

"Certainly not. You hardly know me, Colonel Brisson. When I say a thing, I mean it. I place myself unreservedly in your hands."

"Very good."

"Here is my hand upon it," and Napoleon thrust forward his open palm with great effusion. But no amount of effusiveness could conceal the fact that it was shaking. No quantity of brave words could hide the quivering of his lower lip. It might not have been that he was frightened, but he was nervous and highly strung, and he could not master the outward and visible signs of the intense excitement this sudden resolution caused him.

"Yes," he cried, with a gesture no less impotent than before, and this time meant to denote decision, "we will sink or swim together. You shall essay your plan, and we will go through with it to the bitter end."

"There need be no bitter end."

"I am bound to survey all contingencies. 'He either fears his fate too much—' You know the English saying, Colonel. To the bitter end,—that is my final resolve. As you saw, it took me some time to make up my mind; but once my mind is made up, I am invariably adamant. To the bitter end, my dear Colonel, to the bitter end! You and I between us will reëstablish the Empire or die in the attempt."

How long he might have gone on gasconading in this fashion, history has no chance of relating. Brisson cut him short with military precision. "It is getting late," he remarked, "perhaps I had better go now, and return first thing in the morning. I must have a word to-night with General Changarnier."

"I would like to hear a little about the plan of campaign."

"That's simple enough. To-morrow I shall introduce you to the General and the other leading men of the Paris garrison. We can then arrange a meeting for the night after, in my rooms, to concert plans. The whole business won't take more than a week."

"And what am I to do meanwhile?"

"You must remain indoors as much as possible."

"They will track me down."

"Not a bit of it. This is a capital hiding-place. None know about it except a very few. You are safe here, at any rate for a fortnight or so."

"But I shall go mad if I stay idle."

"There is plenty to be done. And as for De Morin and Hadamard to-morrow, do n't be too docile. Behave as you did this evening—one or two little explosions, and generally agreeing in the end. You may expect me at two." Brisson rose.

"Good-night, Colonel,—and, I say, Brisson,—Canrobert was the last of the Marshals, was he not?"

"Assuredly."

"If we succeed, Brisson, and I become—Napoleon IV, you shall be—you shall be the first of the Marshals."



## Chapter VII

De Morin and Monsieur Hadamard appeared at the appointed hour to take the inventory. They soon came to the conclusion that the flat contained more than enough for a single gentleman; they stopped when they were half-way through the kitchen utensils, and said as much.

"We need n't waste any more time," said De Morin. "Obviously, the place is complete."

"There's the silver," urged Hadamard.

"Oh, we shall see that at lunch. Come along, we'll take him through the accounts."

They took "him" through the accounts. They initiated him in all the mysteries of his allowance; where it lay; how and from what it was raised; and the process whereby he could get any part of it into his possession. The latter point was the most important. De Morin handed Napoleon an entire cheque-book, that was a virgin; and ventured to hope that he would make good use of it. MM. Hadamard and Son were the bankers. Cousin Hadamard, also a member of the firm, begged the Prince to look upon that great house in the light of some benignant relative, whose sole purpose it was to study his pleasure. Then the two gentlemen gathered up their papers, and declared their business at an end.

After that, they strolled about the room and admired the furniture and pictures. They praised his Highness's taste. Both of them stopped simultaneously before a Japanese screen, worked in heavy glaring gold, and declared, with upraised palms, that rich quiet things like these showed your true man of culture. De Morin made a little excursion into the dining-room to have another glance at a bronze statuette; he admired it so. He came back presently, looking a trifle disappointed. Hadamard

asked the address of the Prince's upholsterer; also, whether their host had any objection to his procuring a copy of the chairs. Encouraged by a favourable reply, De Morin made a second excursion into the dining-room, only to return with a face more woebegone than ever. Napoleon was proof against these hints and blandishments. And at last the two trustees had to take their departure, with nothing more substantial in them but the consciousness of their own integrity and virtue.

As it was, they were hardly gone before Brisson arrived, the Colonel being punctuality reduced to fractions. He certainly resembled that virtue in his cheerlessness. He seemed to fancy that the mat in the front hall would be Napoleon's Rubicon; and with but scant regard to the usages of society, and no small talk, hurried the latter across the above-named domestic article into the carriage which was already waiting.

"To the barracks in the Rue Desaix!" he ordered the coachman; then following the Prince into the vehicle, banged the door.

The uncompromising celerity with which the whole thing was done hardly increased Napoleon's confidence. The Prince had spent the greater part of the time since midnight tightening his nerves, that he might carry an unshaken front through the coming venture. But he was once more "all of a tremble" long before they reached the Rue Desaix. His skiff had been caught in a rapid current, and there was no escape on either side to calmer waters. This reflexion did n't quiet his teeth, which were clicking like the piano-keys of an electric telegraph. His restless hands kept raising and lowering the window, on his side, in bursts of feverish impatience. He shuffled with his feet, and most likely would have kicked a hole through the floor, had it been some one else's brougham.

It did not belong to Colonel Brisson, who sat as rigid as a ramrod, and equally unresponsive. They were almost at the barracks when he first broke silence.

"I have been fairly successful," said he. "Out of twelve, five have espoused your cause unconditionally. Three join, but with this reservation, that they must be

allowed to withdraw if they do not approve your plans. Two promise no more than this, to attend the meeting. Colonel Dreyfus, commanding the One Hundred and Ninth of the line, gives an out-and-out refusal. Let me see, that makes eleven. Changarnier is the twelfth. I went to him first; indeed, straight from your Highness's house. He keeps late hours, and I was with him till past three this morning. But I did not get much out of him, I regret to say. That fellow never will commit himself till he sees which way the cat jumps. However, he asks me to convey his sincere respects. He would bring it in person, he says, only he is indisposed. That means, at any rate, that he won't betray us until after we are beaten."

"I call this most satisfactory. Colonel Dreyfus is safe?"

"He gave me his word. He is the soul of honour."

"Why does he stand out?"

"The Republic employs and pays him," returned Brisson, not attempting to soften Dreyfus's words. "Accordingly, as he maintains, he would be a traitor to plot against it."

"You told him that it was his Country, not the Republic, which employed him?"

"No. Dreyfus will hardly make much difference. I have got Colonel Klein, one of his commandants; and in these matters one battalion generally means both."

"Of course, of course," muttered Bonaparte, "two battalions make a regiment."

"The most important of the entire number, Colonel Bonvalet of the Second Cuirassiers, has come in unconditionally. He is wild with delight. I don't think there exists a stancher Imperialist in France. By the way, we are going to his rooms now. And the other 'unconditionalists' are all good men. As regards Brigadier Marchmont, who intends to be present, but won't commit himself further, your Highness will understand the value of first impressions. He, too, is a most important item. His brigade contains some of the officers likely to prove most hostile to your cause. If you win him over, you will have gone far on the road to ultimate success."

"I will try my best," said Napoleon, clenching his teeth.

"Marchmont is to be won over by a firm, self-reliant bearing. Indeed, all of them will watch you very closely; and are likely to be much affected one way or the other by your demeanour. Let them see that you are in earnest, and they will work for you heart and soul. If, on the other hand, they suspect you of being merely lukewarm, and ready to fly to a safe retreat at the first reverse, they won't exert themselves very greatly on your behalf, if even they join you at all."

Napoleon sought composure by jerking up the window, which he fixed, and then jerked down again. In a few minutes he turned to his companion and said:

"I am obliged to you for your sagacious counsel. I appreciate absolutely all you say. You may trust me. I have been too long waiting for my opportunity, not to seize it when it comes. I am not likely to throw it away by weakness."

"You may easily find yourself a trifle nervous," replied Brisson coldly. "Any man might, in the midst of such unlooked-for circumstances. After all, you were not born to this sort of thing. That is why I venture to give you the warning."

"Oh, nervousness is not among my failings," cheerily, and Napoleon almost bit off one of his fingers. "I did not feel nervous last night"—which was quite true—"and it was a much larger meeting than this will be. I had n't a very extensive practice," he added with the frankness that was becoming one of his most charming characteristics, "at the English bar; but I had enough to cure me of shyness." And certainly when he got into Colonel Bonvalet's dining-room, and found himself surrounded by eleven military gentlemen, most of high rank, his tremulousness vanished entirely away.

The meeting throughout was quite informal, the introductions which prefaced it being devoid of all ceremony, Colonel Brisson rapidly presenting each officer in turn according to his rank. General Brêheville led off. The General was short and effeminate-looking, with a dainty little pointed beard, brown and silken, and very

much waxed moustaches. Marchmont followed. He looked almost as incompetent, with his eyeglass that would n't stick on, his loose, weak mouth, which his beard could not conceal, and his flabby manner, that had a trick of never taking him any forwarder. Bonvalet of Cuirassiers followed upon these like a whiff of the sea. All Paris knew Bonvalet of Cuirassiers, the sturdy colonel who had risen from the ranks and still kept his original manners; and Bonvalet of Cuirassiers knew that all Paris knew him. He gave Napoleon a hearty grip of the hand, welcoming him in a lusty voice that appeared to say, "I am Bonvalet of Cuirassiers, I am; the bluntest, roughest, most honest good-fellow in the French army." Colonels Klein, Douay, and Favoust took their turn after Bonvalet of Cuirassiers was disposed of; and they were succeeded by others whom Napoleon scarcely had time to notice, they came and went so rapidly.

Besides, our hero was busy rehearsing a little speech wherewith to commence the real business of the afternoon. He had considerable difficulty in selecting a suitable invocation. "Gentlemen" might be well enough for the Rue Boissy d'Anglas; it certainly would not do here. On the other hand, he could not call them "Comrades" or "Fellow-soldiers." "My friends" sounded Biblical; "My men," impolite. "Officers of the French army" seemed the sole remaining alternative; but it erred by being too descriptive and not sufficiently terse. So, when the last man had departed, he whispered to Brisson, "What shall I call them?"

The Colonel stared. "*Call* them?"

"Yes, how shall I address them?"

"Oh, there won't be any set speeches," Brisson returned abruptly.

And there were n't. Bonvalet handed round a box of big cheroots, and his guests disposed of themselves as they listed about the room,—some on sofas, some in easy chairs, one or two even standing. Bréheville, ever in the front rank where elegance was concerned, draped himself with careless grace along the broad back of a settee, one arm resting on the mantelboard. Brisson alone, of all present, took a seat at the table. As for the



Prince, before he even knew it Bonvalet of Cuirassiers had gently pushed him into a low, deep easy-chair, where, when he reclined its full length, his head came on a level with his knees. Here he lay through most of the subsequent proceedings, tearing a giant cheroot to pieces and then trying to roll it together again, his mind in about the same heaped-up condition as his body.

Bonvalet, who settled himself in the settee under the cover of the back which Bréheville had so gracefully appropriated, and opposite Napoleon, asked the General what he thought of the cigar.

"So, so," said Bréheville, "your last box was better."

"Same price, General, identically the same price. Brisson, you are n't smoking! Pass him the box, Marchmont, there's a dear fellow. Your Highness likes these cheroots, I hope? They are big; but I gave a big price for them."

Napoleon's twitching fingers crumpled the outer leaf into snuff. He tried to kindle the smouldering remnant into a glow, and muttered that it was divine.

"Cheroots are generally big," began Brigadier Marchmont with a vacant smile. "That is, some cheroots are big. I prefer them smaller myself. Not very much smaller; indeed, hardly any smaller. No, no smaller; these are about the right size. I don't think I have seen any quite so big as these before. I am certain I have not. Nowadays, cheroots are generally made small. I prefer them big, myself. If anything, just a shade bigger than these."

"I have n't offered any of you men anything to drink. Your Highness would like a cup of coffee, or a claret and seltzer?"

"No thank you."

"Bréheville, a claret and seltzer?"

"Not for me, thanks. I never drink between meals."

"Marchmont?"

"Well, if you insist; but really I'd rather not. To tell you the honest truth, I don't care much for claret and seltzer. There are many other drinks that I prefer; coffee, for instance, beer, lemonade, sherbet. Not that I

object to claret and seltzer. Indeed, on a hot day like this, it is one of the most refreshing of drinks,—*the* most refreshing, I should say, and certainly the one I prefer to any other. So, if it is n't inconveniencing you—"

"Not in the least," said Bonvalet, preparing to rise.

"So, if it is n't inconveniencing you," Marchmont repeated, in a species of vacant flicker, "I think I won't."

Bonvalet of Cuirassiers relapsed into his settee. "Good heavens!" he shouted presently, "Brisson, you look as though you were sitting on the receipt of custom. Why in the world cannot you come and make yourself at home, like the rest of us? You are positively the only man not smoking! Prince, I wish you would order Brisson to light up."

The Prince's own cheroot was by this time a rag of mangled tobacco. He therefore kept clear of a delicate subject.

Lieutenant-Colonel Klein, who commanded a battalion of the One Hundred and Ninth, and looked and was inarticulate, at this point asked Marchmont for a match.

"I am afraid I hav n't any," that veteran replied. "I *had* some matches half an hour ago",—wistfully, as though their memory thus lamented would suffice to recall them,—"*I had* some matches, half an hour ago, but I gave them away to a beggar in the street. He looked so hungry, poor fellow. It's a very curious thing; ordinarily, I am never without matches. Not that I am a great smoker; but they always come in handy for a friend, or in case one has dropt anything on the floor or wants to burn anything. Yes, indeed, matches are invaluable. All men ought to carry them; I wish I was more in the habit of doing so myself. I am ashamed to say I very rarely do. I wish I did. I *had* some, half an hour ago. Really, I do n't know what you had better do."

Klein did nothing. He had got his match some five minutes back, and was now well hidden behind his cigar and usual wall of impenetrable silence.

"Your Highness has n't been to any of our race-meetings yet?" Bréheville inquired, smiling down from aloft, like some sort of scented deity.

"God bless my soul," Bonvalet responded for the Prince, "his Highness has something better to think about."

"Surely, any man, however busy, can find time to attend an occasional race-meeting," lisped the General. "Look at me. I've got my division to attend to. It is 'asleep,' certainly, and does not give me much trouble; but I am compelled to keep a constant eye on it. Then there is my work at headquarters; and you know for yourself what a troublesome creature Clisserole is. He would not let a man in the garrison rest for five minutes together, if he had his way. But I manage to get an afternoon now and then at Longchamps. So does Marchmont; I meet him there frequently. And you won't find a man in the army who works harder than Marchmont."

Marchmont, thus appealed to, straightway fell to maundering. "Oh, yes, I get down to Longchamps or Enghien occasionally. It is rather a job, as Bréheville justly remarks. Clisserole drives one so. I confess I am exceedingly fond of a good race. There is something so fresh, so diverting, in the spectacle. One can see as much, if only from the crowds that are present at all first-class meetings. The sport is becoming more and more popular every year. Thousands go nowadays who, a couple of years ago, no more thought of attending a horse-race than of flying to the moon. I cannot say I care much for the sport myself. I have only been to Longchamps half a dozen times, and to Vincennes about once; and I do not fancy I shall ever visit either place again. Clisserole is such a terrible slave-driver. When I want to get away to see a race—and that's pretty often—I have to put up with some abominable midday train, which naturally spoils the whole enjoyment."

"Marchmont, you *are* a funny fellow," simpered Bréheville.

"My good friend," the other replied with—for him—a phenomenal access of energy, "we are all funny fellows, if it comes to that. The world contains so much to make us funny—peculiar—strange—I can't get the right word, but you, all of you know, what I mean."

Then he tailed off into fresh vapourings, which Brisson brought to a somewhat abrupt conclusion.

"Concerning what I have already said to all of you separately," broke in the latter.

"Business! business!" groaned their host; "it's always business with you, Brisson. Cannot you let us settle down a bit? Look at the Prince; he is n't half through his cheroot yet. We have the whole afternoon before us."

"Nothing of the kind," Brisson responded. "His Highness and I have much to do before evening."

"As you please," was the muttered rejoinder. "For my part, I do not see what on earth we have got to talk about. The whole thing is settled. It merely remains to fix the date."

Klein looked as though he wanted to say something. Marchmont said it for him.

"Hardly that—not quite that. You are *nearly* right; but not quite."

"Well, most of us are agreed. I am, I know. Your Highness need only say the word, and I would have my boys out to-night,"—he waved his hand in an airy, careless manner towards the window. "We should n't want Klein or Marchmont. We could manage the trick single-handed."

"Nothing equals artillery for street-fighting," Colonel Douay interposed coldly. He had not spoken before; but he had violet eyes and a cheerless manner, features which entitled him to consideration. He was, moreover, an artillerist of some merit. "Cavalry is n't in it," he continued; "your Highness will know that as well as any man."

"His highness was n't present at Vendémiaire," simpered Bréheville.

"I did n't say he was. There are some men who know a little about their ancestors."

"It depends entirely whether they have any ancestors to know."

"Precisely. That is exactly what I meant."

"Come, come," cried the bluff Bonvalet, "we must n't get to high words. What with your bickerings and in-

nuendoes, you two are just like a couple of old maiden ladies. You have both got very nice ancestors, so you need not malign them."

Brisson cleared his throat.

"It is extremely necessary," he began, "that we should all be of one mind. We are not in line yet. General Marchmont, cannot you now give me a definite answer?"

"Well, I don't know; really I don't know," faltered Marchmont. He hardly appreciated the sudden prominence into which the question thrust him. "You see, it does not do to make up one's mind too hastily in these matters. I am exceedingly pleased to meet his Imperial Highness. I was a subaltern in sevent— in the late Emperor's time. Nevertheless, I can't think it is right to throw France into confusion, unless we can be quite quite certain of success. Consider the quantity of innocent blood we shall shed, not excluding the Prince's. No, I can't think it is right. Mind, I do not say it is wrong; but it is n't right—that is, it is n't safe."

"We must do without the Brigadier for the present," said Bonvalet. "He'll come in by and by when he has heard us chat a bit. Who is the other malcontent? There were two, I believe."

"Major Gorin," said Brisson, consulting his notebook.

"Damn it all!" bellowed Bonvalet; "one of my officers! I won't have it, Gorin, you know. I won't have it. Come out of that corner and get Brisson to alter your name."

Major Gorin obeyed at once.

"Mutiny in my own regiment," growled the still irate Colonel. "I never heard of such a thing. It's the fault of that blasted St. Cyr. I won't stand any of their humbug."

"Colonel Bonvalet, Third Cuirassiers," Brisson began in a sing-song voice, "you can answer for your men?"

"Every blasted one."

"General Bréheville?"

"It is rather difficult to answer for a division," smirked that officer. "For myself, I am with you,



heart and soul; but at present my division is asleep, if I may be permitted to use the expression. It is not by any means complete. Half of it is in Algiers; and of the other half, one battalion is with Mesnil in Lille—my best too. That horrid little fellow gets the pick of everything; I do n't like him at all. However, all said and done, I daresay I could manage three battalions for you, three battalions and possibly a squadron of dragoons. The latter, though, are shaky; kindly bear that in mind. Their commander is not to be relied on."

Brisson followed him patiently to the end of his harangue, making occasional notes the while, then turned to Colonel Favoust:

"Colonel Favoust, commanding a battalion of the Seventh of the line?"

"My men are well-affected; I cannot say so much for the officers. Still, I think I could promise a solid five hundred."

"Sometimes the officers influence the men," began Marchmont; "sometimes they do not. I know, when I enjoyed a regimental command, my officers exercised an influence over the rank and file that was paramount."

"Colonel Donremy, commanding the Third?"

"The officers are Imperialist to a man; they will carry the regiment."

"Precisely what would have happened in the Tenth when I commanded it," murmured Marchmont. "The effects were sometimes a trifle inconvenient; but on the whole it is best that the rank and file—"

"Gerardt, how about your dragoons?"

"They are all right. You need have no fear about them. Their sole anxiety is to get to work as quickly as possible."

Commandant Laurent, who had to answer for a battalion of the Ninety-seventh, and Colonel Douay, who could promise a couple of mounted batteries, both gave the same reply. Klein alone demurred. He, it may be remembered, had charge of half Dreyfus's regiment, the One Hundred and Ninth; and when Brisson asked him the now familiar question, he gave an affirmative answer as regards his men, but said in addition:

"My stipulation must not be lost sight of. I do not finally join until I see the plan."

"Klein, you're worse than any old lady," Bonvalet remarked. "What would become of the Prince's chance of success, do you suppose, were the remainder of us to make the same ridiculous reservation?" The taciturn Klein, however, had a soul above polemics. He had said his say, and now he went back into silence.

Brisson turned to Napoleon:

"Your Highness hears these gentlemen? So far, things are quite satisfactory."

"Thanks to you," murmured Napoleon, endeavouring to raise his head.

"Now my idea was," Brisson went on, addressing the general company, "that we should at once, and in this place, agree upon a night. I suggest next Wednesday. We know pretty well the number of troops we shall have at our disposal. Before we separate we can arrange how best to post them through the city."

"Wednesday is rather close," said Bréheville. "It only means two clear days."

"The sooner, the better, say I," cried Bonvalet.

"I think Bonvalet is right," said Favoust.

"And so do I," muttered Major Gorin, with that conviction which comes from a sincere desire to please.

"There cannot be a doubt about it," urged Bonvalet. "What does the Prince say?"

"I am inclined to agree with you."

"That settles it," from Gorin.

"I am not sure," insisted Bréheville. "There are a good dozen men yet to be seen and talked to. Brisson has done marvels, considering the short time: with five or six days more, and all of us working together, we shall capture every officer of note in the garrison. Why, we are not altogether certain of Marchmont yet,—are we, Marchmont?"

"Oh, I would n't quite say that. The fact is—"

"Then there is Clisserole. We cannot possibly move without Clisserole. And Changarnier is another."

"I think you are right," said Brisson. "Shall we make it the second week in July?"

"Good Lord, no!" ejaculated Bonvalet; "that is really a bit too strong. All Paris will get to hear of it. I am no scholar, but I always understood a 'coup' to signify something sharp and sudden."

"What do you say to the fourth of next month?" Brisson inquired of Bréheville.

"Make it the fifth," the other replied. "A much better day, and it will give us a clear week."

"I do not object. Does any one else?"

"I should prefer to-night," grumbled Bonvalet.

"Any one else? You, Klein and Douay, what do you say?"

"I do not object to the date," said Klein, "but I shall have to hear more about the details before I finally consent."

"General Marchmont?"

The Brigadier began to move his ponderous, flaccid mouth, but Bonvalet got in before him. "Let us get to the arrangements. Brisson, that is a plan of Paris at your elbow. Spread it out on the table, and we can all have a look at it."

"Thanks, I need no plans," Brisson replied, consulting another of his many documents. "I have already drawn up a small disposition. It is quite simple, and can easily be modified."

"Really, you think of everything," said Napoleon in genuine admiration.

Brisson cleared his throat. "I suggest nine at night as a good time to begin; except for Laurent and Donremy, who have farther to go, and must therefore start at eight.

"At nine, then, precisely, the rest of us will parade our men in our separate barracks; let them into the secret,—mind, not a word beforehand to a living soul—and march them off to the following destinations. Klein is to surround the Élysée, and get hold of the President. He can take him across the way to my barracks. I propose myself to send a couple of companies to bring in Carache and Pontécoulant; none of the other ministers are worth taking. My barracks can serve as the house of detention; it is central, and shall be strongly guarded.

When Klein has managed Monsieur, he is to rendezvous on the Champs Élysées. My arrangement contemplates further that Douay should have a half-battery stationed by the Ministry of Marine, facing down the Rue de Rivoli—”

“I cannot see the good of that,” interrupted the cuirassier. “Much better let me place a squadron there. We could clear the street very much faster than Douay.”

Douay curled his upper lip.

“It is merely a suggestion,” Brisson answered, “we shall have plenty of time to make alterations.” He resumed his recital: “Half a battery by the Ministry of Marine, half a battery in the Place de l’Opera, half a battery on the Pont de la Concorde, and a couple of guns in the Place de la Republique.”

“I do n’t agree with your disposal at all,” said Douay.

“You must be somewhere, you know,” Bonvalet interjected.

“Quite so, but who is to support me at those distances? I might as well scatter one gun apiece over the different quarters of the city, and leave any one who chose to come and take them. No, I mean to stick to the Place de la Concorde. I do not mind a dash now and again down the Rue de Rivoli. But I’m not going to shed fractions of my batteries over the highways and byways.”

Brisson looked appealingly across at Napoleon, who, on his side, had for the last five minutes been gazing abstractedly at him, and thinking how very much he resembled Don Quixote. The Prince roused himself and turned to Douay.

“The plans will be modified hereafter,” he murmured. “Brisson is only indicating his ideas. And I am quite certain he would not place you anywhere without support.”

Douay mumbled something under his breath.

“I am quite certain of it. Please, for my—for—for—on your loyalty, let him go on.”

Somehow this little appeal did not make a very good impression.

"Go on, Brisson," said Bonvalet shortly.

"Laurent," continued the Colonel from his paper, "is to remain on the other side of the river until he hears from his Highness. He will guard the bridges between Grenelle and the Orléans railway station. No one must be suffered to cross who cannot give the countersign. I also propose that he should tell off three companies: one for the Palais Bourbon, another for the Luxembourg—"

"What nonsense," cried Bonvalet. "They do not sit at nine o'clock at night."

The portion of the table in front of Brisson was by now littered with papers. He made no direct reply to Bonvalet's interruption, but selecting a scrap from among the documents before him, commenced leisurely to peruse its contents.

"I merely follow De Morny," he said at last. "Listen to this. He is writing in 1852: If 'I had to make another *coup d'état*,' says he, 'I should seize two points. and two points only. The meeting-place of the Constituent Assembly is the first and the most important. Get hold of that, even though it be only of pasteboard, and you silence the Assembly. It is as though you were to shut the sea against a whale. The second point is the Ministry of War.'"

"The Ministry of War?" from Bréheville; "really I do n't see the force of that."

"Leave him alone," the colonel of Cuirassiers entreated; "he will only give us more De Morny."

Brisson returned to his arrangement.

"Therefore, as I put it, Laurent will also detach a company to guard the last-named building. These three companies are to remain at their respective posts all through the night. The remaining five—"

"Good God!" broke in the irrepressible Bonvalet; "the fellow knows the merest details. There will only be one place for you, Brisson, when his Highness is on the throne,—the Ministry of War."

"Don't be foolish, Bonvalet," General Bréheville said tartly. "You have no right to influence the Prince's mind in that way."



"At least *you* won't get the job," the other retorted, glancing maliciously up over his right shoulder at the recumbent General.

"I shall withdraw from the whole undertaking if Bonvalet is to be allowed to indulge in these personalities."

"The remaining five, which are scattered over the bridges will, directly word comes from his Highness, march in to the Place de la Concorde. Favoust I have told off to patrol the boulevards from the Madeleine to the Gare de Vincennes. He will also take charge of the St. Lazare, Northern, and Lyons Termini."

"Much too dispersed," Bréheville objected.

Brisson's left hand commenced to wander among his papers.

"More De Morny," groaned Bonvalet.

"The Count says," Brisson remarked imperturbably, "'in street-fighting *divide et impera* is the safest maxim.' Favoust, like the others, will, on receiving word from his Highness, bring his men into the Place de la Concorde. Donremy is to march straight from his barracks, to the rendezvous and to hold it with all its approaches, being especially careful to keep in touch with his second battalion, which I have detailed to patrol the Avenues des Champs Élysée, and Kléber. Gerardt attaches himself to Colonel Laurent and keeps to the other side of the river. He must have his men well in hand, so that he may be able to cross at a moment's notice."

"I do not approve of that," said Marchmont, feeling that it was his turn to create a diversion.

"What is your objection?"

"Oh, I don't know exactly; but I do not approve of it."

"Let him be Brisson; he will never stop, once he begins."

"As regards yourself, General Bréheville," Brisson resumed, "I have put you down for two regiments."

"I cannot possibly manage as much."

"Call it one and a half then?"

"If you choose. But even that is not certain. It depends entirely upon the commanding officers, and two of them are crotchety creatures."

"I want you to give Favoust a battalion. He is not over-strong, and we must keep an eye on Montmartre. A second battalion should go to Laurent across the river, and the third—the third might help Douay with his guns. By the way, did you say cavalry?"

"I daresay I could give you a few dragoons."

"They must keep with Donremy along the Rue de Rivoli for choice."

"I have no objection," said Bréheville.

"What the devil do I do?" cried Bonvalet of Cuirassiers, who had been growing more fidgetty as the minutes went on, and could now restrain himself no longer.

"The Prince has no more faithful servant than yourself," Brisson responded, without, however, any change in the sing-song of his tone. "I have accordingly allotted to you the task of guarding his person."

"It won't take a regiment to do that," replied Bonvalet, glancing with a not over-genial expression at the recumbent figure opposite.

"You could lend Donremy a squadron. The Place de la Concorde is the heart of the position; I have chosen it as the general rendezvous. So our friend cannot be too strong."

"I will take that job. Major Gorin, you will keep a couple of troops and guard his Highness. Do you hear?"

"But I propose that you should have charge of the Imperial escort," Brisson made haste to say.

"I prefer street-fighting," Bonvalet rejoined grimly.

"Oh, I *do* hope there won't be any bloodshed," faltered Napoleon.

Bréheville alone took any notice of this altruism. "Yes," he remarked gingerly, "blood *is* horrid, especially when you can do without it."

"No, no," Brisson insisted, "you must take charge of his Highness's person. It is quite as important as the Place de la Concorde. What *should* we do if, after we had got the whole city into our possession, the Prince was n't forthcoming?"

"Very well," Bonvalet consented sullenly. "Gorin, you will put yourself under Colonel Donremy's orders.

Do n't let me hear afterwards that you permitted the men to use the flat of their sabres."

"Oh, I *do* hope there won't be any bloodshed."

"Go on, Brisson. What's to be done with Bonaparte during the play?"

"I propose that he should remain in my barracks until things are ready for him outside."

"Oh!" said Bréheville, glumly.

"Oh!" muttered one or two others, with the same deprecatory emphasis.

Brisson kept on his course quite unperturbed.

"It is the most central place of its kind in Paris; the Prince can be in the Champs Élysées three minutes after we send for him. Again, the barracks are to be strongly guarded. Bonvalet will be present with his Cuirassiers, and I shall leave some of my own men. Other distinguished people," he added without the flicker of a smile, "will spend the evening there, out of harm's way. I am convinced it is the best plan. The Prince is to move into my quarters at four o'clock that same afternoon, so as to be in safety before the business begins. Bonvalet, you, of course, will not start from here until nine: I ought to have added that."

"And I am to stay hanging about the barrack square from half-past nine onwards? Thank you!"

"You must do what his Highness orders."

"His Highness does not order me to stand kicking my heels for two, perhaps three, hours in your miserable back yard. Flesh and blood can't stand it; at all events, my flesh and blood can't. I *must* see some of the fun."

Brisson appealed to Napoleon.

And Napoleon remarked plaintively, "Oh, I *do* hope there won't be any bloodshed."

Bonvalet, despite the grievance rankling in his breast, burst into a rough laugh.

"Brisson and I will settle it between us afterwards. Continue, my dear Minister of War."

"I find I have forgotten to mention, whatever troops I can spare will be at Douay's disposal. And that finishes the general arrangement. As you see, it has been

made in outline. Any more men we can get hold of can be planted on that skeleton."

There followed a short interval of silence, which was broken at last by Bréheville.

"It sounds reasonable enough. I cannot think of any important omission. Your arrangement provides for every strategic point in the whole city; and, after all, that is the main question. Once we dominate the city, the rest will be quite easy. In fact, there will be no 'rest'; everything will have been done."

"The arrangement seems to me fairly complete," Brisson admitted; "Marchmont, what do you say?"

"Oh, I hardly know. Is not this attempt of yours rather a leap in the dark? The army is Imperialist to the core, and all that sort of thing. And the lot of us have only to speak half a dozen words to our men to get them to join cordially in the project; but—but—is n't the business rather, *rather* sudden; is n't it, so to speak, *rather* a leap in the dark? I do not mean that it won't be successful. I am sure it *will* be successful; and I am one of your Highness's most loyal partisans—at heart, that is, but the project *does* involve a leap in the dark, I am convinced. I should say, nearly convinced."

"There is never any discovering what you mean."

"Colonel Bonvalet, I am addressing myself to his Highness."

"I appreciate your point thoroughly," Bonaparte replied, bending forward, and literally bristling with impatience to get out a satisfactory reply. "There is much truth in your remarks. We *are* going to make the attempt a trifle too suddenly for me to feel altogether easy. A week is hardly time enough, I agree, where one has to arrange the preliminaries of such a gigantic undertaking. I comprehend, too, the difficulty which seems to weigh with you most. The various regiments, according to Brisson's plan, are only to receive an hour's notice of what is required of them. Is this—can this be wise? Had we not far better take the first opportunity to let them know my story and my aims?—at once invite their co-operation? A few pamphlets judiciously distributed,

a word here and there from a commanding officer, and the matter would soon spread in every direction through the rank and file. A month to filter through; a month to germinate in their minds! Tell me, General Marchmont, what do you say to that?"

"I am sure I do not know," said Marchmont, so puzzled and woebegone he might have been explaining the reason for assets nil to the official receiver.

"That would put the date somewhere about the end of September," Napoleon continued, much encouraged by the awe-inspired silence which greeted this first attempt on his part to assume the reins. "We could employ the time in spreading our net outside Paris. Why, in about six weeks, we might have every officer in the service on our side. Little General Mesnil among them; we want him. Yes, yes, I am convinced this is the better course. What say you, gentlemen?"

There was a dead silence. All eyes were turned on the Prince's face. The prevailing look was one of deep consternation.

He did not notice. He imagined that his words had put things in their right place. He was master; they were there to listen and obey. He commenced afresh without a qualm:

"The question arises, what shall I do in the mean time? Paris would scarcely be safe. I have it! I can hide a little way out; some town thirty miles distant, where they will never think of looking for me."

"I withdraw my services," said Klein.

"With great respect to Monseigneur, so do I," exclaimed Douay and Laurent almost simultaneously.

"I shall have to reconsider my position," minced Bréheville.

"And I," "And I," from one or two others.

"I am not sure I don't follow suit," cried the bluff Cuirassier. "By heavens, I won't wait till September." His fierce eyes were starting out of his head; he puffed out both cheeks, possibly to keep the former from dropping altogether.

The defection was now general. It would have gone beyond recall had not Brisson rudely deposed his master



from the box-seat,—a retreat into private life which the latter accepted readily enough.

"We keep to July 5th!" he said decisively. "His Highness merely offered the suggestion. We cannot accept it. Well and good; no harm has been done. Once for all, gentlemen, whatever else may change, the date will not."

These words were received with an unanimous chorus of approval. Every man present seemed to breathe again.

"My word," exclaimed Bonvalet, only he employed a stronger expletive, "what an absolutely insane idea. The end of September! Why, the lot of us would have been in glory by then."

"As for General Mesnil," said Bréheville, drawing a scented handkerchief over his marble brow; "that was a most fatal proposition. He has a reputation certainly, but believe me, Monseigneur, it is quite unmerited. Those who really know him consider him the most incompetent, chattering, self-sufficient little jackass between here and Moscow. And when a man has a bad name in the service, you can be positive there is something wrong with him."

"September indeed!" resumed Bonvalet. Brisson cut him short.

"The incident is at an end," said he. "Concerning General Marchmont, I propose to include him in my list. I put him down at four battalions. Two battalions should go to Laurent, for use on the south side. The remainder had better co-operate with Favoust and Donremy."

A great weight seemed at once to be lifted off the Brigadier's mind. He dropped his eyeglass with a sigh of relief. "Very good," he murmured with genuine gratitude.

"It only remains that we should appoint some one to take the chief command," said Brisson.

Bréheville slid gracefully to the floor. "Exactly so," he remarked, at the same moment beginning to move absent-mindedly towards the table and Brisson's papers.

"General Clisserole," the latter continued, "will naturally have the post, if he joins us."

Bréheville came to a dead stop.

"But the question is," said Brisson, "whether we ought to approach him."

"He certainly is a dangerous fellow," said Bréheville. "One can never be sure what he will do. He might go off straightaway, and disclose the whole business to Carache."

"He would be an immense acquisition," Brisson returned dubiously for the other side. "He carries such weight with the men, besides being head of the garrison. Then there is Changarnier."

"Let us sleep upon it," suggested the Brigadier; "let us sleep on both of them."

"Better leave it," Bréheville said with decision; "the risk is too great. As for Changarnier, he is out of the question."

"Yes, I am afraid you are right. We must choose one of ourselves."

"That will be best. Of course, if Clisserole or Changarnier do come in, the other fellow can easily hand over the command," and the General resumed his interrupted progress towards the results of Brisson's labour.

No one seemed anxious to commit himself to a suggestion. Bonvalet gazed with sinister eyes at Bréheville's moving form.

Klein was the first to speak.

"I propose that Colonel Brisson take the command."

"I second Colonel Klein," cried the Prince. The proposal passed with a minority of one, who did not say anything; Brisson was accordingly declared elected.

Bréheville went quite up to him, and leant affectionately over his chair.

"Brisson, I congratulate you with all my heart," he purred. "Your industry merited such a compliment. But put a little initiative and dash into it as well, dear friend; industry alone, remember, never yet sufficed for a *coup d'état*. Make a determined effort to copy the Morny, whom you are so fond of quoting. It will be hard; still, a man of your perseverance may reasonably hope for a fair amount of success. *Élan* is what you need most. By the way, I think you said the fifth?"

"Yes."

"I rather fear I shall be absent from Paris on that date. I hope not. Sincerely, I hope not; but I am afraid. I shall be able to let you know for certain, a day or two hence."

"At any rate, we may count on your division?"

"Oh yes, you may count on my division. I am afraid, though, you will not find them much use without me; the regimental officers are so pig-headed."

Brisson collected his papers, and rose from the table, at which he had sat with such patience during the greater part of the afternoon. "The full number of us," he said, "must not meet together again in one room. I should like to see the infantry officers at the club the first thing in the morning. Bonvalet, Gorin, and Gerardt, perhaps you will call at my quarters to-night between eight and nine. Monseigneur, I am ready."

## Chapter VIII

The Prince's brougham stood waiting at the gates. But their next place of call was evidently too near for driving. Merely ordering the coachman to follow them, Brisson led his companion out into the Boulevard de Grenelle, and stopped before a lofty block half-way down that thoroughfare.

The aspect of the place was not inviting. The hall, especially, told of jerry-builders and grasping landlords and tenants belonging to the lower bourgeoisie, who did not care for elegance. The very atmosphere was rigorous "unsuperfluity." Only the most genuine solidity of structure could compensate for such pervading baldness. But one felt instinctively that the place was as flimsy as it was unadorned. Nor did its character alter as they mounted the stairs. The walls, mottled to represent marble, though free from dust, and scrupulously clean to the touch, had here and there great grimy patches, showing where the damp of less clement days had trickled through. Iron wire globes guarded the gas-jets on the various landings: the banisters were of the same metal, and somewhat worn. They came to a standstill on the second floor, opposite a door which displayed immediately beneath its knocker a small white card bearing the inscription, "M. Anatole Godefroy. Theatrical Printer." With his hand raised to tap, Brisson turned and whispered to Napoleon:

"You observe, we shall have to trust one man outside the garrison. Old Godefroy is a stanch Bonapartist, and absolutely safe."

Having given this explanation, he rapped. The door was opened almost immediately by a cheerless female, half-servant, half-housekeeper, who conducted them to

the sitting-room without comment, and then went off in search of her master.

Napoleon's mind was not too busy to take in the features of the apartment. These weren't numerous. The walls were littered with playbills old and new, the latter variety predominating. The clouded mirror that extended the length of the mantelpiece and went up to the ceiling was stuck with photographs of theatrical celebrities, most of whom had enhanced the value of these presentments by autographs and dedications couched in friendly terms: the majority being "To my dear Godefroy" from the affectionate, sometimes even grateful, donor. Apart from these meagre ornaments, however, the room fulfilled the promise of the stairs. The furniture was scanty, and, what there was of it, ponderous. The wall-paper, so far as the posters permitted one to see, vied in ugliness with the mottled marble outside. The carpet was mainly linoleum, and linoleum, too, of an attenuated kind. In short, the place displayed itself to Napoleon's eyes as scrupulously clean, but totally devoid of either comfort or beauty; and a second look at the photographs over the fireplace showed that they, too, had taken a tone from the surrounding gloom, and imported rigid lines not possessed by the various sitters.

Presently the door swung slowly open. Nothing appeared. Nothing appeared for full three minutes; then amid a deal of wheezing and creaking the owner of this forbidding abode slowly emerged into view.

The gentleman in question was phenomenally fat. His face was phenomenally red; his eyes phenomenally small. Good living, good nature, acuteness, contentment,—all these virtues shone forth from his refulgent countenance. For the rest, he wore bulky trousers and a black alpaca coat, which presumably kept him cool, though it did n't look like it.

"Good-day, Godefroy," the Colonel commenced. "You got my message, I suppose?"

"I did," replied Godefroy, in the rich, hoarse voice which one is apt to connect with many meals: "I am quite at your service. Pray be seated," and Godefroy fixed his keen little eyes on the Prince's face.



"I presume this is the gentleman?" he said after a short scrutiny.

"You are right," Brisson replied.

The printer turned to his Highness. "You have been a long time coming. For my own part, I began to think I should never see you. I am delighted to find that I was wrong. Well, Colonel, and what do you propose to do with the young gentleman, now you have got him?"

"We mean to make a stroke."

"Hum."

"A very rapid one too; and you will have to help us."

"Hum."

"In fact, the night of the fifth is the agreed date. We shall want some proclamations printed."

"I don't mind getting them done for you."

"Four or five thousand?"

"Yes, I daresay I can manage that. But I am too old to go running about myself. I shan't take any personal part in the *coup d'état*; so don't count on me."

"My dear Godefroy, certainly not. You will get the placards posted, of course?"

"On the same night?"

"Between ten and eleven."

"I'll do that much for you. Is there going to be bloodshed?"

"I *do* hope not," Bonaparte murmured.

"Not if we can help it, you may be quite sure. Personally, I do not anticipate any resistance. The government are hardly likely to make a stand; and certainly no one else will. Paris will probably be favourable."

"The public will be right enough," Godefroy assented, "provided you do not make too much noise. The thing must be short and sweet. We do not want business or the theatres interfered with. By the way, did you say the fifth?"

"The fifth."

Godefroy ambled up to the mantelpiece and examined a memorandum planted among the photographs.

"What a pity!" he cried, "I had almost forgotten. I am exceedingly busy on that night. There are powerful

clagues wanted for the new opera and the Hippodrome. Could you manage to postpone your little affair till the evening of the sixth?"

"Impossible."

"I suppose I shall have to put up with it," he grumbled, as he returned to his seat; "but certainly your business will cause me a deal of inconvenience. All these things seem to happen together. Make it the fourth!"

"Out of the question. Our arrangements are nearly all complete. It must be the fifth."

"As you please, as you please," the other responded sullenly. "You will leave a copy of the manifesto?"

"I will write one out directly I get home, and bring it round myself before noon to-morrow."

"That must do," still sullenly. "Try and write more distinctly; and don't use both sides."

But good nature was the rule with Godefroy. He thawed before very long, remarking with a winning smile:

"You won't make a noise near the Opera House—promise me."

"We will try our utmost not to make a noise anywhere."

"No shots nor groans nor horrors of that kind? It simply means ruin to the piece if you do."

"Rely on me to do my best."

"That's a good fellow. In return, I will have the proclamation put up in my most expensive type. It sha'n't cost you much more."

"We do not consider the expense."

"Ah, but the young gentleman will have to. We cannot have an extravagant rule: things must henceforth be done on the cheap. Remember, young gentleman, the country has not too much money to throw away."

"Yes, yes, we shall see to that. The third Empire will alter many things."

"I am glad of it: many things need altering. Among others, my office, I consider, ought to be made a government appointment. At present I depend for a living on the good will of the various managers. What a monstrous position for a man of my age! Why, to-morrow I might find myself with my sole means of livelihood

entirely gone, compelled to quit so much comfort and elegance,"—he looked complacently round the room,—“and dependent altogether on the charity of kind friends like Colonel Brisson here for my daily bread.”

The poor fellow grew quite depressed by this melancholy picture, which he had been at such pains to conjure up. He shook his head sadly from side to side, gazing now at Napoleon, now at Brisson, for some little responsive mark of sympathy.

“You must n't take such a despondent view,” said the Colonel. “You have heaps of friends who would be only too glad to help you if the need came, which it never will. All the managers in Paris swear by you. Probably you are a capitalist by now. You must have saved?”

“Not a farthing,” the other replied emphatically.

“Never mind. Give us satisfaction, and his Highness no doubt will find you an independence.”

“I do not desire an independence.”

“A permanent post?”

“That's more like it. That is exactly what I *do* want. And when this young gentleman is on the throne, I shall take the liberty of reminding him.”

“I trust I shall not need reminding.”

“Oh, they all say that. In point of fact, there is nothing makes a man forget so quickly as a throne.”

“Not when he has lived so long as I have among the forgotten.”

“I daresay you will be much the same as all the rest.”

Brisson here intervened, making a successful effort to rally the old gentleman out of his ill humour.

“Godefroy,” he cried, “you are one of the pillars of the party. You surely are n't going to turn crusty at this time of day? His Highness says he will remember, and I do n't for an instant doubt he will. If he does n't, you shall remind him; you are likely to have plenty of opportunities for so doing. We must get on. Here is a second job for you. Upon the night in question, we want fifty strong and trustworthy men, all with powerful voices, in each quarter of every arrondissement. They

should be at their several posts by nine of the clock, and should start at once to patrol their districts, shouting for Napoleon IV, and against the Republic."

Godefroy kept nodding his head backwards and forwards in unison with Brisson's words, something after the fashion of a toy China mandarin.

"That means about four thousand men. It is rather a lot; especially side by side with the opera and the hippodrome. You really could n't make it the sixth?"

"The men are to be had I suppose?"

"They are to be had; but, all the same, it will be a difficult job to get them."

"You can draft some up from the provinces."

"Not the same thing at all. Provincials are no sort of use in Paris; people spot them at once. I will do my best with what I have got; I cannot say more. They won't all be trustworthy."

"We must risk that. Mind, not a soul is to know a word of this until the night of the fifth! Get your men together, of course; but tell them nothing before the hour arrives. The same with the bill-posters."

"You need not waste time on foolish details," remarked Godefroy. "I may not be a colonel of Engineers, but I am not quite an idiot for all that."

"You must forgive me if I am over-cautious."

"Oh, I forgive you. I offered the advice more for your own sake. You cannot have too much time to waste."

"You are right. Indeed we have not."

"Then don't waste any of it on me. I know about as much of these things as most men, though I say it, who should n't."

"Our visit is sufficient proof of that."

"Then we won't say another word. You military men do get so precise and minute. I suppose it is because you have mostly to deal with one another, and the majority of you enjoy weak intellects."

Brisson rose. "There is nothing more, I think. We trust implicitly in you. You shall have the manifesto before noon to-morrow."

"There you are again!" and Godefroy held up a

warning forefinger which looked uncommonly like a thumb. "I have already heard twice about that manifesto, and made a note of it. I do n't want to hear of it a third time. I shall send my bill to the Élysée. Good-day, gentlemen. You will excuse my coming to the door."

Colonel Brisson saw Napoleon to his carriage, and there said good-bye. "I need not trouble you further to-day," he added. "I shall hope to find you in between one and two to-morrow. Go out as little as possible; and then not on foot if you can possibly avoid it."

The Prince arrived home to find Monsieur Verre in possession of his apartment. The ex-Premier was pacing up and down the library, his hat on his head, and evidently something equally weighty on his mind.

"My dear Sadler," he shouted, directly he caught sight of our hero, "I bring news of great importance. Prince Felix Bonaparte dines with us to-night. You must be present. The Bonapartes are useful people to know. Mark me, Victor is not destined to stay in Brussels much longer."

"I fear I cannot come."

"Nonsense, we won't hear of a refusal. The Prince may take a fancy to you, if you are only as witty as you sometimes can be. He will possess sufficient influence to get you, say, an under-chamberlainship. Your ability entitles you to such an office; while your likeness . . . forgive me . . . ha, ha," and Monsieur indulged in a softly significant chuckle.

"No, really I shall be unable to accept."

"You must come, and there's an end of it. *Au revoir*—dinner at seven-thirty, sharp."

And in the end Napoleon went. Prince Felix Bonaparte *was* an attraction. Every one knew the little fellow. He had won fame for his unbridled profligacy, which made the capital, as he used to say, the only place he could comfortably live in. It certainly rendered the city possible. Carache and Pontécoulant knew his little ways, so exempted him from the effects of the law proscribing the other members of his family. They turned his peccadillos to account. The official journals kept a



discreet eye upon his intrigues; detectives tracked him behind stage doors and into more than one *cabinet particulier*. While Felix himself went on his path pleasure-seeking, with a reckless cynicism which helped more towards publicity than a whole universe of spies and government organs.

The prospect of a meeting tickled our hero immensely. The danger seemed inconsiderable. With a found Bonaparte in their midst, the company would scarcely be likely to think of the lost one. But the situation proved far more novel than he anticipated. It was also less amusing. Prince Felix had the face of a libertine. His features were bloated and puckered, combining into a point which was neither the eyes exactly, nor the mouth, nor the nose, but a little of all three,—a point, in fact, which one felt rather than actually saw. Before and after dinner he stood in the centre of the drawing-room, directly underneath the Venetian glass chandelier, and gazed with bedimmed eyes on an astonished world. In the dining-room he had other things to think about. Every one was on their knees to him. The atmosphere seemed to breathe the word “Monseigneur”; and more than once our Napoleon turned sharply, under the impression that he himself was being addressed. Once he did this when Verre was by; the ex-Premier took half his meaning.

“Not yet, my friend,” laughing and tapping the young man on the shoulder. “We should all like to be princes; your turn will come. But this time I meant his Highness yonder.”

It was gall and wormwood to Napoleon to see this ungainly creature strutting about in borrowed plumes. Perhaps the bitterest pill of all was the way his hosts neglected him. Save for a single hearty “Hullo, Sadler!” and the remark about princes just referred to, the husband took no notice of the guest he usually treated so well. As for Madame, she gave our friend a frigid bow, and nothing more. She had evidently heard of the Mendril fiasco. Now Napoleon had no special regard for this good lady; but cold looks from any one invariably upset him. So he worked his way round to where she

was standing, and, calling her attention off the porpoise,—she was gazing with rapt eyes on Felix,—ventured the remark that it was a brilliant evening. Her rejoinder was civil, but totally devoid of cordiality. Walter, however, persevered.

"I appreciate being asked on such occasions," said he, looking across affectionately at his cousin.

"My husband said you would. For that reason *he* asked you. You Englishmen are so fond of notorieties—'lions' you call them?"

"Yes, but they are rather exacting in England," Napoleon answered with a genial laugh. "I fear his Highness would only be rated a tiger over there."

Madame bridled. "He is third in the succession, and may well be Emperor. He *will* be Emperor,—very shortly too. I ought to know; I have helped govern this country."

"Indeed."

"Indeed, Monsieur Sadler. And then, my dear friend, you English will have to quit Egypt."

"Madame is very kind. She forgets, perhaps, that I am a Frenchman."

"Ah," Madame exclaimed sweetly, "that accounts for your unlucky attempt at the Faubourg St. Honoré the other day. They are not over-fond of Frenchmen there."

"I am obliged to Madame for having reminded me of an unpleasant incident. I should hardly have ventured here to-night had I foreseen what was in store."

"Oh," she replied, making a great show of indifference, "my husband asked you on the spur of the moment, without having first obtained my permission. Naturally, when he told me, I pointed out that you would probably *not* put in an appearance."

"You are extremely frank," cried our hero, now blind with rage. "You affect to despise England, Madame. No hostess in that benighted country ever thinks it worth while to insult her guests."

"But, dear Monsieur, your English ladies have more effective ways of excluding undesirable people."

"I sha'n't give you much trouble henceforward,

Madame. And your wretched flat too; I have nearly done with that."

"Ah, my husband will know how to deal with anything of that description. We have poli—lawyers in Paris."

What would have happened next it is difficult to say, for they were commencing to attract general attention. Fortunately, Monsieur Verre intervened at this critical juncture. He pushed himself with considerable ostentation between the combatants, remarking in his loudest and most cheerful tones: "You wicked people, you are talking politics. Come, dear Monsieur Walter, permit me to introduce you to his Highness," and thus they left Madame in sole possession of the field of battle, and blinking furiously.

"Monseigneur," Verre continued with a deal of unction directly they were under the shadow of the great man, "may I present Monsieur Sadler to your Highness?"

Prince Felix turned his dull eyes upon the new-comer, and surveyed him slowly from top to toe. Then his tiny imperial moved ever so slightly, his debased mouth assuming the ghost of a smile. Presently he spoke; instead of a heavy, guttural bass, such as one would look for from this torpid mass, his tones were thin and piping and shrill. The effect was weird in the extreme.

"Monsieur," he asked point-blank, "are you an adherent of Victor's?"

"I can hardly say that."

Felix looked immensely pleased. "You do not mean to say that you are one of those infatuated people who deny the right of the late Plon—Prince Napoleon?"

The young man hesitated. Verre whispered: "You are doing finely. Persevere on that tack."

"I confess I do not, under present circumstances, regard Prince Victor as the rightful heir."

"Prince Louis is in the same boat," responded Felix promptly. "From the personal aspect he is even a weaker candidate than his brother. Victor is bilious; he is devout. Last winter De Morin and I had all the difficulty in the world to keep him out of a convent."

"His religion might temper down were he to find himself face to face with the throne."

Verre treated his companion to a secret nudge. Felix's visage resettled into its native ugliness.

"Louis will *never* be Emperor," said he with conviction. "He has practically renounced his rights. The crown lies between Victor and me, and Victor is almost out of the running."

"Would you like the task?" Napoleon asked bluntly. If this absurd creature saw no objection to discuss such things publicly, he himself saw none either.

"It is not a question of liking or not liking," said Felix with great disdain. "An historic name, such as we three young men inherit, has its responsibilities as well as its pleasures. Victor and Louis forget that; I do not. The former nurses himself in Brussels, and is supremely happy. Louis has his regiment and his convent in Siberia, and is contentedly miserable. I—but come into that recess yonder; I am tired of standing. You are an intelligent young man, and it is a pleasure to listen to you. Verre, you need n't come. Go across and talk to Madame: she looks quite angry at your long neglect."

When the two cousins were comfortably seated, Felix resumed:

"I, alone of the three, live on in Paris, braving Carache and a thousand dangers, having eyes and thought for nothing but the duty I owe France. I do not say that the throne will be as easy as the comparative privacy which I now enjoy. Nevertheless, I mean to bear every trial with extreme fortitude, and make no doubt I shall adorn my position.

"You surprise me."

"I do not understand why. As it is, I am *de jure* Emperor: it is but natural that I should be ready and waiting. Now, you might well confess yourself surprised when you hear how I work. I rise at nine, and spend the whole morning from nine-thirty to eleven over political history, constitutional history, strategy, higher mathematics, and dynamics. I do n't intend to let German William do all the lecturing, as you may suppose.

I receive practical instruction in building earthworks, fortresses, and ironclads. I know the Code Napoleon off by heart, and mean, by and by, to alter the part of it which deals with divorce. I can tackle, and usually vanquish, the most expert political economists in Europe. In a word, I am encyclopædic. There are not three crown prices put together, between here and Japan, who know a tenth as much as I do."

"This is good hearing for one of your future subjects."

"I imagined you would be pleased."

"You mentioned strategy," pursued our hero; "I trust you do not mean to involve us in war with Germany?"

"Not the least intention," the absurd creature answered promptly. "We French have no need of Alsace-Lorraine. Why should we bother?—we can procure better pâtés from Perigords. Here is a secret for you, my young friend, and take care you do n't breathe a word to a living soul."

Felix bent forward so as to bring his unwholesome mouth on a level with Napoleon's ear.

"What I *do* mean to have is the kingdom of Italy! Mind, there won't be any fighting. That old ballet-dancer Panani will succumb as soon as he sees that I am in earnest. Once master of the Peninsular, I shall be able to buy chianti—a drink to which I am very partial—at one third the price. Chianti and Italian produce! think of it, my dear Monsieur! But no more on this topic at present. Not a word to any one, not even to your mother!"

"My mother is dead," the other replied with impressive simplicity. "She"—apropos of the chianti, perhaps, and the Italian produce—"she was married at Cremona."

A shade passed across the Prince's face. "I pity her," he said, "the place is a dustbin, and not fit for a cat to die in. To return to my day!"—brightening up—"listen to this as a sample of how I work. At eleven I have *déjeuner*. You may imagine, I eat very sparingly. The stomach and the brain are close relations; and it is imperative that I should keep my head clear. I begin on



an *hors-d'œuvre*,—prawns, anchovies, sardines, or anything of that sort. Then follows soup, fish, a couple of entrées, a wing of a chicken, some pastry, cheese, and dessert. I also drink a half-bottle of champagne as a specific against influenza, which, like the poor, is always with us. My sole indulgence is a glass or so of maraschino and a couple of cigarettes. After *déjeuner*, I take a couple of hours' nap. At two I go out for a drive in the Bois. Four to seven, my only quiet time in the day, I read the papers, and eat cakes to prevent an empty stomach. At seven I have my one good meal, after which I feel I can fairly devote the remaining hours of the twenty-four to my own pleasure. I usually visit the opera or spend an evening at a friend's house. At midnight I have supper. It *is* an arduous life, I confess; but, as I said before, men situated as I am have responsibilities no less than advantages. I am bound to be ready for the day."

"When do you think it will be here?" Napoleon inquired.

"I cannot give any exact date,—one not far distant, of that you may be sure. Carache says six months; I say three. We have got a bet on it. If he is right, and I begin my reign six months from now, he is to be my Prime Minister for six years from the date of commencement. If wrong, then he will only get the job for half that period, after which I am to choose whom I like. And furthermore, in the latter case, he is to pay me two thirds of what he makes over and above his salary. He is such an amusing dog—that Carache."

Napoleon was dumbfounded at this frank confession. He looked quickly up, half expecting to see a smile hovering round the other's mouth. But Felix maintained an absolutely grave demeanour.

"I suppose Carache helps you?" asked the former with failing heart. He felt powerless to fight against a combination which included the Prime Minister.

"Help me!—to do what, pray? I don't want any help."

"But surely you are working—laying the ground for a Restoration—a *coup d'état*, or something of that sort?"

"A *coup d'état*! Good heavens! you do n't imagine I am going in for that kind of antiquated bosh? I am always in Paris. And when the day comes that the nation declares for Imperialism, I shall send a reply-telegram to Brussels; give Victor an hour to decide; and then take a cab to the Élysée."

"Your Highness does not mean to leave the President much time in which to pack."

"My dear friend, he won't need it. His things are packed already. I assure you, he is reduced to the disagreeable necessity of taking shirts and collars from his portmanteau as he wants them. I like you," he went on with that frankness princes alone may use; "I shall hope to see you at the Élysée." He shuffled his swallow-tails and pulled forth a note-book bound in crocodile and edged with beaten bronze.

"Let me see," he resumed, reading therefrom, "Grand Chamberlain, the Count de Morin; Comptroller of the Privy purse, Monsieur Hadamard; Premier, Carache. Vice-Chamberlain—yes, I can manage an under-chamberlainship for you. What do you say?"

Napoleon was far too overcome by this sign of De Morin's perfidy to make any direct reply. "Who did you say was to be Grand Chamberlain?" he faltered.

"The Count de Morin."

"Ah, I am acquainted with him."

"A venerable old man, but also somewhat of a nuisance. It was his duty, you may perhaps remember, to drown that Capelli-Bonaparte brat. He performed the task most punctually, as I have good reason to know. Yet the old wretch now declares that the insect is alive; and, the other night, he paraded an impostor at a meet—but I have no patience with him. How much will you give for that under-chamberlainship? There will be pickings."

"I am not rich."

"I daresay you could manage a thousand or so. Sleep on it."

Madame Verre came rustling up.

"Really, Monsieur Sadler," she exclaimed, all smiles, "we cannot have you monopolizing his Highness in this

way. Monseigneur, I still have numbers of people to present to you."

"Bother!" muttered the crazy fellow. "We were happy enough in this corner. Mind, Monsieur, you are to come and see me. By the way," he whispered, "I should have told you. I am not going to take the title of Felix—too Eastern, you know. The good old name will do for me. The Emperor Napoleon IV, that's my future description. Good-night, Monsieur. I shall expect you to make it two thousand francs. The job is cheap at the money."

## Chapter IX

July the 5th came at last, dawning cloudless and brilliant. Napoleon, who had spent the night in a fever of wakefulness, could not have welcomed victory more. He sprang out of bed, and after a hurried toilet, descended into the street.

But no amount of fresh air could dissipate the fears which haunted his brain. The memory of '51 swam scarlet before his eyes. *He* had no desire to wade through blood. Notwithstanding the inordinate thirst for fame which still survived the glories of the Rue de Berlin, the thought that the search for it might mean death to many quite appalled him. Strangely, too, there arose a shrinking dread of notoriety. How different it looked, now it was imminent, this prominence he had once desired so fiercely. The antipathy grew with the day, until, when it was time to seek Brisson's barracks, he would have given much to stay at home and spend a cosy evening reading in bed, the electric light conveniently above him, his face turned towards the wall.

Four of the clock was the hour appointed to cross the Rubicon—or rather the threshold of the Colonel's quarters. The latter had not yet returned. A servant conducted our hero into the library. Newspapers littered the table; but any other token of a regard for higher things was conspicuously absent. The book-cases were an arid waste. A posthumous work on "Street-Fighting," by De Morny, proved the sole oasis in this intellectual wilderness. It lay open, face downwards, on the arm of a chair; Napoleon glanced at the title and turned away in disgust.

The room contained two doors beside the one by which he had entered. His listless mood tempted him

to examine both. One was locked. The other opened into a bedroom. The bed looked particularly cool and inviting. Without a second thought to his boots, or his position as a guest, he flung himself down and gazed onto the ceiling. He was a man who met all his difficulties upon his back.

He may have lain two hours, and would no doubt have continued another two, had not the pangs of hunger driven him back into the library. The servant was busy setting the table for dinner. The whole thing began to resemble a page out of the Arabian Nights. For a few minutes neither man spoke a word.

Napoleon broke silence first.

"What time is it?" he asked, forgetting his watch.

"Ten past seven, Monsieur," without looking up.

"Has the Colonel returned?"

"No, Monsieur."

The Prince began to feel uneasy. "He will dine with me?"

"My orders are to lay for Monsieur alone."

"It is very curious," was the muttered rejoinder.

"Did Colonel Brisson leave no message for me?"

"No."

"Nor mention at what hour he would return?"

"No. Monsieur is served."

Bonaparte desisted from further questions, suddenly recalling to mind that he and this precise orderly had met before. He went through his dinner, then lit a cigarette. No one came, until he began to fancy that his present isolation was to be like chloroform, ending only when the whole trouble was over. Nor was it unwelcome in such a guise. Our hero suddenly meditated a return to bed. With his head buried among the pillows, he might reasonably hope to escape the noise of battle. He was rising slowly to put this plan into execution, or at all events to reconsider it nearer the door, when the servant brought word that Brisson was at length returned to barracks and would be with Monsieur almost immediately. The Prince's only answer was an additional glass of wine. Ordinarily abstemious, he had tossed off a good many to-night. The last, as always happens,



proved the most potent. His whole body became as calm and inflexible as death; his mind ready to face and beat back the worst. It was marvellous; and as he stood with arms folded and squared shoulders awaiting the Colonel in the centre of the floor, he seemed to be conscious of this himself. To employ a homely picture, he had tight hold of the elbows of his chair.

Brisson, however, came in smiling, so Napoleon's shoulders fell back insensibly into their original drooping position.

"My dear Brisson," said he, "where in the world have you been? This room is pleasant enough, but four hours in it, without a soul to talk to, is more than even I can stand."

"I must ask Monseigneur to forgive me. At least, my afternoon has been spent in his service."

"I am sure of that. Still, you might have left me something to read."

"There were the newspapers," replied Brisson, glancing round the room, "and De Morny's book. I felt sure the latter would amuse you."

"Quite the contrary. Tell me, are matters going satisfactorily?"

"Yes, so far. I got rather a fright, though, this morning. Bonvalet came rushing round here with a cock-and-bull story that Mesnil was in Paris. There is no truth in it, I am glad to say. I have telegraphed to Lille, and have received a reply from the little fellow himself. He has not been in town this year, so he declares, and hopes not to be. The government clearly can suspect nothing."

"And Clisserole, what about him?"

Brisson became quite gleeful. "He has gone suddenly to Royat to take the waters. Changarnier sent me word last night. Your Highness will have to bear the latter in mind when the time comes. It is a great triumph. Not counting Changarnier himself, Bréville is now the senior officer left in Paris. We must be moving."

"I am ready."

"One word before we go. The part which your Highness will be called upon to play in to-night's proceedings

is small. I propose that you should say a few preliminary words of encouragement to my officers, and then return to this room and await events in safety. Bonvallet will remain on guard below. Directly we are ready for you—it cannot be much before midnight—he shall receive word to bring your Highness to the Place de la Concorde. On the other hand, if we are beaten—”

“Which heaven avert!” muttered Bonaparte.

“If we are beaten, he has orders to call in Major Gorin and to escort you with his full strength to the Gare de l’Est, where a special train will be waiting to carry you into North Germany. May I add a single other word of advice?”

“Certainly.”

“Monseigneur has appointed me to the chief command; and whether this arrangement turns out right or wrong, it is the best I can devise. One thing is sure, it cannot possibly succeed unless all concerned—from the highest to the lowest—do their allotted task with scrupulous fidelity. Your Highness will bear this in mind. *Your* task is small, but it must be performed faithfully and correctly. You ought not to budge from this room until you are sent for; and—and—”

“Well, my good Brisson?”

“This is the most difficult part of all. When need arises for you to show yourself in public,—now, at once, in the messroom, later on in the Place de la Concorde,—remember this before everything else: The eyes of all present will be turned upon your face. Be careful, I pray you, that it shows no sign of fear,—nervousness. Calmness and self-possession will stand you in the stead of a dozen regiments, take my word for it.”

“I know, I know.”

“I am bound to mention it,” persisted the blunt, outspoken Brisson. “The thing would be different, did you possess some experience in these matters. You have none.”

“Calmness does not come with experience,” retorted Napoleon with an air of profound wisdom.

“But you will remember my warning?”

“Yes, I will remember it. Lead the way.”

The officers of the regiment, with Bréheville, Bonvalet, and one or two more from outside, stood about the messroom awaiting their arrival. A deep silence hovered over all, a silence which was neither broken nor intensified when Napoleon entered. The gravity of the occasion bore its presentment on every face. Bréheville had lost his simper. The purple Bonvalet looked more like a damped furnace than a colonel of Cuirassiers.

"Welcome, your Highness," said the former of the two. A faint murmur traversed the length of the room.

At that very moment, as if to heighten the effect, the jar of the barrack gates swinging open floated through the summer night. Presently they could hear the clatter of cavalry in the barrack square.

"My men," muttered Bonvalet. He stood behind Bréheville, near the door.

"Do they know?" asked Colonel Brisson.

"No," replied Bonvalet. "They were simply told that they would be paraded with your Engineers at nine o'clock. Good; Gorin is five minutes before his time."

"And your men, Brisson?" put in General Bréheville.

"They will be told at nine o'clock, like all the rest. The only thing is, he went on dubitatively, "who is to tell them? Bonvalet understands his men, and I understand mine. But you are senior to both of us. Perhaps you will address them?"

"I have no objection," said Bréheville, glancing at Napoleon.

"But surely," interposed Bonvalet in a voice that was a cheerful change after such a surfeit of subdued tones, "that is a task for his Highness and for no one else!"

"I should have thought so too," murmured another officer.

"But the men may prove hostile," hesitated Brisson.

"They most certainly will, if they know that the Prince is lurking in here and dare'n't face them," remarked Bonvalet, bluntly.

"We ought not to let him run any risks."

"We all have to run some risk."

"But his life and liberty are of such vital importance."

"He stands to win the most, if that's what you mean."

"I do n't know how to decide," returned Brisson.

"It is n't for you to decide at all. It is for his Highness. Monseigneur, what do you say?"

Napoleon wavered and looked at Brisson; but the Colonel's face showed utter perplexity and nothing more. To tell the truth, this direct appeal to himself took the Prince somewhat by surprise. It came upon him when he was vacantly noting the distinction of his morning clothes among so many uniforms. From Brisson's countenance his eyes moved round the room. Every one present appeared to be awaiting his choice with great anxiety, and this made the task all the more difficult.

Nor was he permitted any lengthened period for deliberation. An officer entered with news that the troops were drawn up and waiting.

"We are coming," said Brisson.

"Well, your Highness?" said Bonvalet.

Napoleon made a second circuit of the room for inspiration, with identical results.

"I really do not know how to answer you," he faltered. "Brisson's view has much to commend—" The look of consternation, unveiled and ample, dawning on Bonvalet's face gave him pause in the midst of his sentence.

"We have no time to spare," urged General Bréheville.

"We are waiting for his Highness," Bonvalet said stonily.

"You must make up your mind," from Brisson.

Napoleon shut his eyes tight and drew a long breath. "I will address them," he cried. "I am ready,"—a sigh of relief rose from all sides.

"That's right," cried the Cuirassier. "Lead off, Brisson. You are at home here, you must remember; and we are n't."

The Colonel at once resumed his usual business-like

demeanour, issuing orders right and left in a monotonous tone of command.

"Commandant Rendall and Lieutenant Mascout, with Major Gorin of Cuirassiers, will remain in the messroom. Should they hear from me that the regiments are unfavourable, they will come and assume command in the Republican interest." The officers named withdrew to a corner of the room, evidently comprehending the unspoken part of their instructions. Brisson had not quite done with them, however.

"If all goes well," he continued, "Rendall, you are to join the regiment. Major Gorin has his orders, I believe. Lieutenant Mascout remains in attendance upon his Highness. Now, gentlemen,"—turning to the others,—"to your places, if you please. His Highness follows presently."

"Wait," interposed General Bréheville, as the subordinate officers commenced to file out; "Monseigneur means to address us first."

"There is no time," from Bonvalet. "The speech-making must be done outside."

Bréheville showed some disposition to contest this curt objection, but Bonvalet waved his hand brusquely towards the door, and the Indian file which had stopped for an instant went on again. In a few minutes only the four of them were left—Napoleon and Brisson, General Bréheville, and the colonel of Cuirassiers.

They stood for an instant without advancing, round the open door. Brisson looked inquiringly at his companions; they at one another; then the former set out to lead the way. The Prince went second: Bonvalet and Bréheville, side by side, brought up the rear. Horses awaited them below. They mounted in silence; and, keeping to the same order, rode slowly forward through the inner yard.

It was a striking sight. These sombre horsemen advancing slowly and without so much as a whisper on such an errand. Here and there a gas-lamp shed its fitful glare upon them as they passed. Above, the vault of heaven, patched with many different hues of darkness,



and gemmed with a myriad stars. And everywhere a wondrous stillness, deepened by the deadened roar of life that flowed outside, and broken only by the clang of their horses' hoofs upon the flags, or an occasional sharp word of command, which grew scarcer as they approached the outer square.

Brisson took a sudden turn and disappeared through a low-roofed archway, the walls of which were so narrow they appeared to Napoleon to scrape the worthy Colonel's knees. He himself hardly dared follow. "Straight on," whispered Bonvalet from behind. The Prince obeyed. He pushed forward, bending his head, though there was no need, and tightening both legs against his horse's belly. A minute later, he was in the barrack square and face to face with the Prætorian Guard.

Brisson reined to one side to let him pass. In this new order the cavalcade advanced,—Napoleon leading.

The tension of the last few hours had reduced him to a state of drowsy indifference akin to the calmness of despair. He looked listlessly in front of him. What he saw—those two black, shadowy masses, separated only a little from one another, each so silent and so menacing—left him totally unmoved. The whole thing might have been a dream.

The two regiments, drawn up at right angles to one another, formed the farther sides of a square, towards the centre of which Bonaparte and his companions were now slowly moving. The Cuirassiers, sitting cloaked and motionless upon their horses, looked more like statues. Their greater height attracted his idle gaze and kept it, although he was soonest under the shadow of Brisson's Engineers. Presently they were well within the two converging lines, and a fixed shape settled down over the details of the picture. The infantry, upon their left, stood like a solid wall. No order to salute had been given. The men's white faces went in and out of shadows under the flickering lights, being thrown, when lit up, into ghostly relief against their sombre uniforms. Not that Napoleon noticed them, having eyes alone for Bonvalet's horse in front. He watched the faces, half hidden though they were by the peaks of their shining helmets. He

marvelled how the men could sit so still; all the more, as here and there a restive steed would start to paw the ground, or to shake its head violently with every piece of brass upon its bridle.

Nearer and nearer he approached, not knowing when to stop, nor greatly caring. Brisson spurred abreast of him to lay his hand upon his wrist.

"Halt," he murmured; "this is far enough. Be brave!"

It seemed to the Prince that the speaker, and not he, was most in need of the admonition. In after days he used to declare that he heard Brisson's heart beating with absolute distinctness, while he himself, as he maintained, remained devoid of all emotion, whether of fear or excitement.

"What must I do now?" he asked indifferently. Brisson glanced back over his shoulder. "Bonvalet, Bréheville," was all he said. Then, motioning Napoleon to stay where he was, himself advanced another ten paces or so towards the frontmost lines. Bonvalet and Bréheville, meanwhile, brought their horses' heads to a level with the Prince's boots. He could hear them loosening their swords, and his mind, prolific of inconsequent fancies, straightway instituted the comparison between himself and a magistrate about to read the riot act.

"Soldiers!" began Brisson in tones that rang out sharp and clear.

It was the first sound to break the terrible stillness. A faint rustle of curiosity passed along the ranks, like the sougling of the wind, leaving breathless attention behind.

"Soldiers! Prince Louis Napoleon—the lost Bonaparte—has come to Paris!"

No sound greeted this announcement. No sound except Bonvalet still loosening his sword,—“My God!” the latter muttered, “our good friend does not mince matters.”

“The Prince has come,” continued Brisson. “Listen, my comrades. I will tell you why he has come so late.”

The Colonel thereupon proceeded to give the brief outlines of Napoleon's story. The greater part of it—the Capelli marriage of 1789, the wishes of the great Emperor, the history of the Capelli-Bonapartes down to the death of our hero's father, and his mother's flight to England—he treated as too well known, as in truth it was, to need much repetition, dwelling instead with greater detail on the Prince's English existence, his ignorance of his lineage, and his strange return to Paris.

The entire narrative hardly lasted five minutes. At the end of it Brisson paused for some sign from those terribly silent auditors of his.

But no sign came.

"The Prince," he went on, no trace of despair in his voice, "having learned about his birthright, immediately resolved upon its recovery. But how? that was the question. The Count de Morin took him to a meeting of the Bonapartist party. They accepted his identity without a murmur. They were overjoyed to see him. They voted a handsome allowance; but they would not lift a little finger to put him on the throne. It was at this moment that he fell in with some of us of the army,—Generals Changarnier and Bréheville, Brigadier Marchmont, Colonel Bonvalet, and myself."

"That ought to fetch 'em," groaned the penultimate warrior in Brisson's list. "Curse them, the dogs, why don't they cheer?"

They gave no reasons; but they did n't.

"We felt certain that the army would accord him an unanimous welcome. We told him so. Were we—" but the silence was too appalling. He dare not put such a direct question at that juncture.

"We told him so, and he believed us. He determined to place himself unreservedly in our hands. And we—we resolved upon almost immediate action. Mind, I am speaking of what occurred only eight days back: you will admit we have not dawdled. The first, indeed the only, step was to give you his story and invite your aid. At this identical moment three fourths of the Paris garrison are learning these matters, as you have just learnt

them, and are being asked to declare in his favour. Aye, and more than that. They are being asked to march out forthwith and help overthrow the Republic. We do not anticipate for a single instant that they will refuse. Nor that you will, either. If we did, do you imagine we should come thus and ask you point-blank to draw your swords on his behalf? Should we not rather spend months in preliminary plotting, getting hold first of this man, then of that, trying to leaven the lump only by degrees? We have attempted nothing of the kind. Let me repeat. The Prince has been barely a month in France. But eight days have elapsed since he, acting on our advice, made up his mind to rely solely upon the army. And here we are inviting you to co-operate in a *coup d'état* which is to begin at once. This does not look as though we had left any room in our calculations for your refusal. The other regiments won't refuse, you may be sure of that. It is more than likely that some of them are already at work. Shall it be said that you hang back?"

Here at length was the direct question. It elicited absolutely no reply.

Colonel Bonvalet drew his sword, and commenced abstractedly stroking his horse's mane. The animal was startled, and bounded forward. The clatter evidently caused Brisson some alarm. He turned sharply to discover the cause. Then he waited till the beast was quieted before resuming.

"Engineers!" he cried, but without much passion, being unable to simulate a quality foreign to his nature, "have you forgotten that Arcola and Lodi are engraven on your standards? All of you, are you French soldiers and yet able to remain dumb in the presence of the great-grandson of Napoleon? Yes, in his presence. The Prince is here!"

A second and deeper whisper of surprise passed along the ranks, followed again by silence—the same hateful, interminable silence that bore presage of so much evil.

"He remembers Arcola and Lodi, if you do not. He might have had the escort of any regiment in Paris. Yet he has chosen to commit his safety to your keeping. And you are dumb! So you mean to disgrace your

Colonel. You are going to show yourselves unworthy of this great mark of trust! Cuirassiers, Colonel Bonvalet is behind me—will you not follow him?"

No sound.

"For God's sake, do you try!" whispered Bonvalet in the Prince's ear; "otherwise the whole thing is lost. These accursed fellows won't rise to Brisson; it's no sort of use. My men shall smart for this in the morning." At the same moment he twisted his heel and flicked the Prince's horse with his spur. Napoleon made no attempt to stop it as it started forward and carried him ahead of Brisson.

"I am the Prince," he shouted wildly, hardly conscious of what he was saying; "I am here to fight for the throne and for the glory of France. The Republic has brought nothing but disgrace. Will you not trust me and give me your aid? See, how I have trusted you! My fortunes, my very life, are in your hands!"

The only answer was Bonvalet's hoarse whisper from behind:

"Brisson, draw! What are you thinking of? Get closer up to him, man!" and then there followed the sound of Brisson obeying.

Napoleon got a little nearer the frontmost lines.

"Engineers! Your Colonel has told you I am a great-grandson of the first Napoleon. Remember what he did for France! how he carried her eagles over the length and breadth of Europe. Remember, too, I beseech you, what you did under his leadership. Are you going to forget the Bridge of Lodi? I have not forgotten it. Otherwise, for what reason am I here, when I might at this moment be on my way to the Élysée? I implore you, prove to me that my confidence has not been misplaced. I promise—most solemnly I promise—if you help me now, once I am on the throne I will have thought alone for the glory of our dear country."

His voice rose in despair. "A second time I implore you, give me an answer. Behold, behold how I trust you!" And to the horror of his three companions he put spurs to his horse and rode right into the first line of Cuirassiers.



"The game is up," said Bonvalet to Bréheville; "they will kill him."

"Won't you answer me?" the Prince almost sobbed. "I swear to you, make me your Emperor and I will lead you to your revenge across the Rhine. Or kill me if you choose, but pass over my dead body to Alsace-Lorraine!"

He had been a long time groping—here was the right note at last. The fearful silence was broken. A wild shout greeted his words. "Vive Le Prince!"—"Vive L'Empereur!" they shouted; "Alsace-Lorraine!"—"Alsace-Lorraine!"

## Chapter X

But the night's work was only just beginning. Already the two colonels had restored silence and drawn their men apart. The Engineers commenced to leave the barracks, company by company, under Commandant Rendall. Major Gorin led off one battalion of Cuirassiers. The second, after furnishing an escort for Brisson and Bréheville, were kept behind to guard his Highness, not to mention any other distinguished personage whom Colonel Klein might bring in. Soon our hero was left in almost total solitude. The barrack square assumed sombre proportions. A couple of cavalymen patrolled the farther corners; while a dismounted picket guarded the archway. A young lieutenant of Engineers, Adolph Mascout by name, had been left in attendance on his Highness. Accompanied by this guide and protector, the latter found his way back to Brisson's library, where the remains of his dinner still lay in enticing profusion under the gleams of a hanging lamp.

The two of them had scarcely crossed the threshold when the faint roar of musketry broke in upon the stillness of the summer night. "Good Heavens!" cried Napoleon, "what was that?"

"The street," the Lieutenant replied, looking wistfully at the food.

"No—no—there it is again!"

"That," answered Mascout, "is some one following us up the stairs."

"We have failed! They are coming to ar—"

"It sounds like a lumbering cavalryman. Probably it is Colonel Bonvalet."

It was that truculent warrior. He came stamping and prancing in, aglow with good news.

"Five minutes of the game," he shouted, "the first five minutes! and we have actually made a haul."

"But—but—I thought I caught the sound of firing the second you came up the stairs. The Lieutenant here heard it."

"I say it was the street."

"No, no; it was a rattle of musketry."

"I don't know anything about *that*," Bonvalet returned. "All I can tell you is, that Klein has collared three of them, including Old Boots. The dear old chap has given us a deal of trouble; but I have him safe and sound in the inner guardroom. He will calm down by and by, when he finds that events are too strong for him. I am compelled to lodge one of the malefactors in this part of the world—in this house, in fact. None of the d—d rooms possess keys. But he won't interfere with you, I daresay. By the way, one of them turns out to be that old Judas, Verre. He had quite a quarrel with me in the guardroom. He pretends that he is one of the chief props of the Bonapartist cause; and that Prince Felix, if only I will send round to him, can easily prove it. As though I could spare men to scour all the disreputable corners of Paris. I told him as much." 'Oh,' says he, 'if that's your objection, send instead for Monsieur Walter Sadler, who lives quite close, in the Rue de Berlin.'—'Nonsense,' says I; and that finishes it. I think I have persuaded him that he will be quite comfortable for a night or so with us; we certainly sha'n't need him longer. I have also promised to send a message to his wife—if I can."

"I think you may safely release Monsieur Verre," said Napoleon.

"Oh, I can't interfere with Brisson's arrangements," replied Bonvalet curtly. "I only came to give you word how things were going. I must be off."

"Monsieur Verre is a friend of mine."

"I have my orders, Monseigneur. Make a good meal. Above all, keep up your spirits."

"How very forgetful of me," said Napoleon to Mascout, when Bonvalet had walked himself off; "you must be hungry. You would like to eat something."

"Indeed I should."

"Pray begin at once."

"But your Highness?"

"No, I cannot eat. That horrible sound still echoes in my ears."

"It will be worse later on," said the young fellow cheerfully. He sat himself down without more ado and presently became lost in the pleasures of the table. Not for long, however. He was in the midst of a refreshing draught of claret when a message came from Bonvalet, desiring his immediate presence in the guardroom. With a muttered imprecation and a second draught by way of stirrup-cup, he rose and departed.

So it came that our hero was driven to the "street-fighting" for diversion. He found the book swollen to twice its natural size by loose scraps of paper—cigar-bills mostly—all scrawled over with Brisson's views on De Morny. The fly-leaves had been used for the same purpose. Here and there choice passages showed heavily scored with blue pencil. Indeed, not a page but bore some such token of approval. Nor did these finger-posts at all interfere with Napoleon's enjoyment. On the contrary, they helped to fix his attention. He speedily became quite interested. Brisson's plans then possessed some cohesion after all. They were not the haphazard, loosely knit concoctions he had previously imagined. Every feature of this *coup d'état*, so far as he could discover, took its rise in De Morny's wonderful book. Even this ignominious seclusion to which he was subjected, while others did the fighting, had chapter and verse. It was a point whereon his distinguished connexion was especially emphatic.

"The man," De Morny remarks in more places than one, "on whose behalf the *coup d'état* is made, should be careful not to venture out of doors during its continuance. For one thing, consider the terrible consequences should he lose his life or be taken prisoner—either contingency a very possible one! At the supreme moment—at the moment of victory, he is nowhere to be seen! Such a catastrophe is to reduce a noble political engine to absurdity. Again, it will not assist him to the

good graces of his subjects, if afterwards it be discovered that he showed himself out of doors when blood was flowing."

Brisson had added a marginal note: "I agree absolutely."

The room, it will be remembered, contained a third door. This Napoleon had endeavoured to open on the occasion of his first entry, but without success. Since then he had not given it a second thought.

He was so immersed in De Morny, he did not observe the handle of this door slowly twitching backwards and forwards. Some one on the outside was trying to get in. Napoleon turned a page; the key turned softly in the lock. He stooped down to recover one of Brisson's hieroglyphed cigar-bills which had fluttered to the floor, and at the same instant the door moved gently forward and a man stepped into the room.

"Well, Monsieur Walter Sadler," said an unfamiliar voice.

De Morny fell with a thud. Bonaparte's heart nearly went with it. He looked quickly up. Monsieur Carache, Prime Minister of France, stood smiling down on him with seraphic tenderness.

"Well, Monsieur Sadler!" he repeated in the same playfully admonitory voice, "so this is your doing, is it? Oh Cæsar, Cæsar, what a baneful example you have bequeathed to mankind!"

"I am sitting at dinner with my wife and little girl," he continued, striking an attitude, but still sweetly smiling, "I have taken my first mouthful of minestrone—a dish to which I am especially partial—when a servant rushes in and informs me that a company of soldiers are encircling the house. The same minute, a clod-hopping lieutenant with dusty boots comes tramping up the stairs and into the dining-room, and declares me his prisoner, —me, the Prime Minister of France, prisoner of a mean little subaltern on ninety sous a day! Naturally, my wife and little girl are terrified out of their lives. I am hustled off then and there, thrust into a four-wheel cab, already containing Verre and other malefactors, and brought round to these disreputable barracks, where I am made



to sit half an hour in a very unclean guardroom. I, the Prime Minister of France!—awaiting the pleasure of a sodden colonel of Cuirassiers! Prince, Prince, I thought we had long ago relegated this sort of thing to Sofia.”

“I am very sorry you should have suffered any inconvenience,” ejaculated the Prince. As yet he hardly knew what to make of this intruder. Prime Ministers, as a rule, don’t carry knives; and Carache’s affable smile, tinged though it was with intense melancholy, did not look suggestive of murder.

“Inconvenience—you may well call it so. Really, had I known the description of treatment in store for me, I should have clapped your Highness into gaol three days ago.”

“But—” began Napoleon, aghast.

“There are no ‘buts’ about it,” returned the Minister, wagging his finger. “The man has to get up very early in the morning who wants to circumvent Carache. Three days ago? Why, I may say, I had a suspicion of your very identity before you yourself even knew it. I call it exceedingly ungrateful of Colonel Brisson. Here, I might have had the lot of you arrested three days ago. Instead of doing anything of the kind, I simply ordered Clisserole off to Royat. And this is your return! You lock me up in an unlighted room with nothing in it but the smell of food. How long do you intend to keep me there?”

“I cannot say, indeed I cannot. It does not rest with me.”

“Until the morning, I will wager that much. Me, the Prime Minister of France! And I have n’t had a mouthful to eat since noon to-day.”

“Won’t you take something?”

“I shall be glad to. I am positively famishing,” and Carache sat him down and began where Mascout had left off.

The food, whereof he partook with an ungrudging hand, could not make him any sweeter than he was. But it helped to dissipate his depression.

“I must n’t be understood as imputing any blame to your Highness,” he remarked presently, between two

mouthfuls. "I know, better than most, a man cannot be everywhere. Doubtlessly, it annoys you quite as much as it does myself, to hear how I have been served."

"Most certainly."

"A man of my rank,"—taking a deep and refreshing drink,— "who has been Premier I do n't know how many times, and will be Premier again about as often."

Napoleon saw no reason to dissent from this statement.

"But he won't benefit by it—Brisson won't. No man ever benefits by crossing me. This chicken is uncommonly good: they live well in the army."

Carache took some of everything, smiling at the viands much as he had smiled upon Napoleon. When he had had enough, which was not for a considerable time, he came and sat himself down opposite the Prince in the most natural manner possible.

"You have been pretty quick about this business," he remarked, holding one hand in front of his mouth, while he picked his teeth with the other; "it cannot have been more than a month ago since we met in London."

"I do not remember the occasion," said Napoleon. Even Muriel had for the time being escaped his memory.

"At Jervis's restaurant."

"Ah, yes; you were there that night."

"I noticed you. I had an idea that something of this sort might happen."

"It is more than I had," laughed the quondam barrister.

"Exactly. So I may claim to have discovered you even before De Morin. Your marvellous likeness to Plon—or, I should say, to his uncle, the great Bonaparte, first put me on the right track."

"Many men possess that likeness."

"Not in such a marvellous degree. You have their gestures—their little mannerisms. I knew Plon-Plon, so I can say it. Does not De Morin tell you as much? By the way, Monseigneur will pardon me, but he was not in a very cheerful frame of mind, that evening?"

"I was poor, if you mean that?"

"I saw it at once. Your whole appearance denoted

the great soul ground down by poverty. Lord Framlingham's daughter is pretty, is she not?"

Bonaparte started. Muriel had only that instant come into his mind. He was not fickle-hearted, that he did not remember her always; but any man might be forgiven forgetfulness in such a whirl as this.

"She is very pretty."

"I thought your Highness admired her. I understand she is to be over in France this year. No doubt we shall see something of her at the Élysée."

"The Framlinghams, then, know the President?" said Napoleon abstractedly.

Carache laughed. "Your Highness has taken lessons of De Morin, I perceive. No; the President's days are numbered."

Napoleon joined him in his mirth, blushing a little.

"So you think we are going to succeed?"

"Of course you are. Have I not assured your success? Did n't I send Clisserole, the commandant of the garrison, off to Royat? More than that, I discovered, this very morning, that old—Monsieur had got wind of the affair. Monsieur le Président had actually sent for Mesnil from Lille on his own initiative. I—I, Carache!—countermanded the order. To-morrow morning, Paris will be patting Brisson on the back as the hero of the *coup d'état*; but your Highness, and he likewise, will know that one man, more than any other, deserves most of the credit."

Bonaparte could not stifle a smile of self-conscious complacency."

"And who may he be?"

"Myself! When you are Emperor you will not forget that?"

"Then you will be prepared to serve the Empire?"

"'France and duty before all'; there you have my motto. Whither my motto points, I go. I presume there will be no radical change in the constitution?"

"I can promise you that," was the decisive reply.

"I promise to leave every institution, excepting the Presidency, of course, absolutely intact."

"Then I do not anticipate that you will have to

change your advisers. The Electorate is very fond of me—me, tempered with your merest flavour of Pontécoulant. We can commence in the morning where we left off to-night."

"I do hope they are treating the President properly over there in the guardroom. Bonvalet seems to me such a rough diamond," murmured Napoleon, suddenly calling to mind that tall and gracious presence, which had bestowed such genial courtesy upon him only a few weeks back.

"He is all right. You may trust Bonvalet not to commit himself too deeply before he knows for certain the side that is going to win. I know the fellow well. It is just those rough diamonds you mention that have facets to catch the light, whichever way it comes. Suppose you get beaten after all, do you think Bonvalet will be caught? Not he! He will produce a dozen unimpeachable witnesses to prove that, on the night in question, he was ill in bed with influenza, the other side of Siberia. The evidence of the President and myself will go for nothing."

"He is such a kind and genial fellow," continued Napoleon, still thinking of Monsieur, "I should be indeed sorry were he to suffer any annoyance. Do you think that this business will chagrin him very much?"

"Not in the least. He has finished half his term, and is already sick of the Élysée. He won't care two sous either way, provided he is given time to remove his effects. I am the man to complain."

"Do you fancy he could be prevailed upon to take office under the new order?" hazarded the Prince. Carache looked glum.

"I do not anticipate any immediate change in the opinion of the Electorate. It is likely to remain content with me—tempered by Pontécoulant—for some little time to come. Still, if you wish it, I will ask him if he would care to go back to the Marine. I daresay I can find another job for the present man."

"If you see him to-night, you might convey my respects to him, also my sincere re—"

"I am not likely to see him. That abandoned Bris-

son has established a sort of martial law. Neither Monsieur, nor I, nor you, will be suffered to budge until he gives permission. It is very overbearing. He certainly won't advantage by it; no one ever does who treats me in this cavalier fashion. I presume Monseigneur has promised him some reward?"

Monseigneur blushed. "Yes, I have," he blurted out. "He is to receive a Marshal's bâton, provided we win."

"My dear sir, you mustn't think of such a thing, really you must not!" cried Carache, altogether dumbfounded. "A Marshal's bâton! Why, we dare n't give more than one, and that is promised already."

"I was not aware of it."

"Yes; I have promised it to Changarnier," replied the Premier. "A brigade will be ample reward for Brisson's services. He and Bonvalet shall have one between them,—the latter to be commandant."

"But—"

"No 'buts,' my dear Prince. I will manage it for you, never fear. The Premier has to do these unpleasant little duties. A Marshal's bâton! I have never heard of such a thing! Changarnier quite understands that he is to receive the only one. If we deceive him, we shall have him in open revolt. After Mesnil, he is the most influential soldier in France. He would very soon pull the Empire about our ears, I can tell you. My word, how that fellow Brisson has been imposing on your inexperience."

"Perhaps you may be right."

But these are depths of meanness which even an irresponsible chronicler shrinks from laying bare. To do the Prince this justice, the next minute he was sorry for what he had said. His foot by chance touched Brisson's book upon the floor. The picture straightway rose before his eyes. The heroic, silent man, gauntly erect upon his horse, steadfast in the presence of death itself, winning *him* a throne. But what can a man do, slung up between earth and heaven? Everything would be different, later on.



Carache went to the table and poured himself out a glass of wine.

"Now as to higher politics," he said comfortably, after this refreshment. "Your Highness will find my—and Pontécoulant's—experience of invaluable assistance in these matters. Let me say this much of Pontécoulant, in passing. He is no leader, but one of the most competent of servants. On the few occasions when he has presided over the Cabinet, I have been the real leader, stooping to the second place merely temporarily, and owing to the exigencies of party warfare. I think it will be generally admitted, not least by the Minister of the Interior himself, that I am head and shoulders his superior in eloquence, initiative, and indeed all the qualities requisite to one who is called upon to command."

"I am afraid I do not know Monsieur Pontécoulant."

"That is a pity. One has only to see Pontécoulant to know what type of man he is. But surely you have met him? I even remember having observed you talking together,—at Verre's house, I think it was."

"He may have given me a couple of fingers, now and again. I never get more from important people like Pontécoulant and—"

"You mean me," said Carache, suavely. "I know the occasions you refer to. I did it, you may be sure, with a purpose." He did not add what purpose, but contented himself with a knowing look. As for Napoleon, he neither knew nor cared to know the point of those disciplinary measures.

"We shall be all the better friends for it," Carache went on.

"I do not doubt it."

"I cannot tell your Highness how I have appreciated this little talk of ours. Brisson's rudeness has turned out a blessing in disguise. It has solved a problem which, during the last few days, has bothered me very much. I wanted a word with you, and did not know how to get it."

A sudden impulse drove Bonaparte to a very obvious question.

"What will happen, supposing we are beaten?"

"I shall shoot Bonvalet and Brisson," returned Carache, without an instant's hesitation. "I don't appreciate their Bulgarian tricks. As for you,"—surveying the Prince meditatively,—"I suppose we should have to deport you and leave you to return another day. If we decapitated you, we should only have Victor to deal with, or Louis, or, worse still, that worm Felix. And you know the saying, 'One decapitated pretender goes farther than four live ones.' Nevertheless, I should give you a baddish quarter of an hour before I let you go. In France," he wound up, with a burst of involuntary self-congratulation, "a really clever man may be Premier, off and on, from the time he reaches his majority to the day of his death. Hark! What was that?"

The Prince knew the meaning of the sound only too well. It rudely recalled all the miseries of his present position.

The noise came closer. "What was that?" repeated Carache with an approach to peremptoriness.

"I fear it is the sound of firing," Napoleon said apologetically. A cold sweat suffused his brow. He felt like a man seated at the bedside of some suffering friend. The symptoms of the feared and fatal malady have been absent for a while; there arises in their place the faintest glimmering of hope. Alas! the dreaded signs return, resummoning despair, and tinging with a retrospective bitterness the lightened moments that have passed away.

"There it is again," snappishly from Carache. "My word, what a mess there will be in the morning! Paris won't get over this for days. Thank heavens, Victor Hugo is dead! Curse that blundering Brisson and his Balkanizing. He sha'n't even get his brigade if this sort of thing continues. On second thoughts, Monseigneur, you had better begin with Pontécoulant. He is more the man for this sort of work. I shall be found more suitable later on, when things have quieted down a bit."

"Some one is coming across the yard," said Napoleon, anxious to be alone with the firing.

"Bonvalet by the sound. I am not anxious to meet him. These swashbucklers are intolerable when they get a little power into their hands. I suppose you will leave Monsieur a day or two to get comfortably moved. I daresay I shall find you at the Rue de Berlin in case I want you in the morning. Good-night, your Highness."

Carache disappeared, to return, however, a moment later. "I beg your pardon, could you oblige me with the loan of your matches? That brute Brisson—" but the passage door burst open, and Carache's burst to, with a simultaneity which nipped in the bud any further remarks the latter might have desired to make, while reflecting the greatest credit on his presence of mind.

It *was* Bonvalet,—Bonvalet as breezy and boisterous as ever.

"Better and better!" he cried. "I have just looked in to tell you the good news. Laurent and Gerardt are masters of the south side, from Grenelle to the Gare d'Orléans. The troops have everywhere met with the most enthusiastic reception. One of my own men, who has just brought in a message from Gorin, tells me that the throngs of people round your proclamations still continue as thick as ever. You might be the Prodigal Son, the way you are being welcomed home."

"There has been some firing," hesitated Bonaparte. Some more "firing" came pat upon his words.

"Oh, there may be a little tiff here and there," Bonvalet returned carelessly.

"You do n't expect these things to go along quite on castors, especially when one remembers that Douay has only just got hold of his new guns."

"Good God! You do n't mean to say that the artillery have been in—in—action."

"They have done a little," Bonvalet admitted; "nothing else could be expected. Years ago Douay used to say that he would like to knock a hole in the Tour de St. Jacques. It is not in human nature to reject so long looked for a chance when it does come."

"This is terrible," moaned the Prince. "I did hope there would be no bloodshed. You do not know how many people are killed so far, I suppose?"

"I certainly do not. Brisson does not keep me posted in worthless particulars of that description. When they are dead, they are dead, and all the counting in the world won't resurrect them. By the way, Brisson himself is wounded, so they tell me: a bullet through his hand, or something of that sort."

"I hope he is not disabled," exclaimed Napoleon, with a rapid resumption of worldliness.

"No, he's all right," grinned Bonvalet. "We always anticipated that the fighting would be round the Opera House, and you see we were right."

"Oh dear! oh dear!" the poor Prince commenced moaning anew, in a paroxysm of terror, "to think that these things are happening not quarter of a mile away, and I am sitting hidden in this corner. It is contemptible! People will say I am afraid."

"They would say so were they to see you now," Bonvalet ejaculated bluntly.

"I cannot endure this inaction any longer. It is killing me. It is killing me, I tell you. I shall go out and join Brisson!" He started to his feet, and seized his hat and the riding-whip which the Colonel had lent him.

"Impossible. Your Highness cannot move from here. I have my orders; I must obey them."

One of Douay's mitrailleuse spluttered out concurrence. The noise that followed was not the crumbling St. Jacques. Bonaparte became hysterical.

"Am I your Prince, or am I not? I order you to stand aside. I *will* go and stop this slaughter. I would to God I had never assented." He strode to the window, flinging it wide open. Bonvalet half imagined that he contemplated this avenue of escape.

"Fetch my horse!" he shouted down to the sentinel. "Now, Colonel Bonvalet, if you please, stand aside from the door!"

"I am sorry," doggedly from the Colonel; "I am compelled to refuse."

"How dare you say that to me? Am I not the Prince? Who compels you to refuse?"

"Colonel Brisson."

"Who is Colonel Brisson? Brisson—Brisson—always Brisson! He directs every one and everything. He orders this, and forbids that,—his hand is everywhere. One would imagine that he was fighting for his throne, not for mine."

"I daresay he thinks so himself—when he looks at his wounded hand."

"No sneers, if you please."

"It was agreed that he should take the chief command," persisted the Cuirassier.

"Yes, but under me. There is my horse. Come, let me pass."

"Not so loud, I beg. The men will hear us."

"I do not care. Away from the door, I say!"

Bonvalet turned his eyes to the ground, lost in deep thought. He seemed about to relent. His opponent waxed more imperious than ever.

"Suppose I let your Highness out of barracks—what then? What can you do? What do you propose yourself?"

"I am not called upon to render you or any one an account of my intentions," the Prince replied; so he straightway did, though with excessive hauteur.

"I propose to ride down to the Opera House and put an end to this slaughter."

"Satan himself could not do it. The *coup d'état* has begun; it must go on to the bitter end. No power in heaven or earth can stop it. You should have thought of your scruples before."

"I did not know."

"You might easily have guessed," rejoined Bonvalet with something approaching a sneer.

"You surely did not expect that you had only to appear to be received with acclamation. Thrones are not to be got that way. At any rate it is no use your intervening at this stage. You can do nothing."

"I mean to have a good try," said Napoleon, employing that voice of muffled determination so habitual among thoroughly weak men.

"I fear it is impossible. I beg you, do not lay me under the necessity of a further refusal. Please try and comprehend the difficulties of my position."



Napoleon's sole answer was a step towards the door.

"Be reasonable, I beg of you."

"I will go. Let me pass. I insist. My horse is waiting below. I refuse to be made to appear ridiculous."

"You will certainly ruin all if you do go out."

"I will risk that."

"You may be killed or taken prisoner."

"I do not care."

"And all for what? You can do no good."

"I can try."

"What about us, then, who are risking all on your behalf? Do n't we deserve some consideration?"

"It is just on that account that I mean to put an end to this butchery."

Douay's accursed artillery, which had been silent a while, recommenced its horrible splutterings, causing the humane creature the most atrocious agony. He danced about, now on one leg, now on the other, in turns imploring and commanding to be allowed to go forth and put a stop to such horrible carnage. It did him infinite credit. Bonvalet said as much, while remaining obdurate. At last Monseigneur came quite beside himself with rage.

"Once more, and for the last time, I order you to stand aside!"

"I refuse."

Napoleon clenched his teeth and hands and made a dart towards the door. The burly Cuirassier, however, was too quick for him. He flung one arm round him, holding him in a vice.

"I am sorry indeed that your Highness should drive me to violence. For God's sake be quiet! We shall have the whole barracks here."

"Let me go!" shrieked the Prince, struggling madly in his efforts to be free. He was startled by the touch of something hard and cold upon his forehead. Its effect was magical.

"I shall be forced to do it," said Bonvalet sadly. "I should be very distressed, of course; but if you will make the thing necessary—in any case, you had better be killed in here than in the streets."

"Take it away," said the Prince, shutting his eyes and trembling violently. "I will be quiet."

Bonvalet at once withdrew both the restraining arm and pistol, which latter implement, by the way, was unloaded. Napoleon sank back panting into a chair.

"Monseigneur will give me his promise not to renew the attempt?"

"No," ejaculated the vanquished man sullenly.

"Then I shall be compelled to spend the rest of the evening in this room. It may seriously affect the success of our enterprise."

"Let it!" rejoined our hero, falling into the tone of a whipt child. "I have good reason to know what a valuable servant you are."

Bonvalet took the arm-chair lately vacated by Carache, folding his arms with a great show of patience.

For a while no sound was heard beyond the ticking of the clock and the tread of the sentinel below. The Prince's horse had been discreetly withdrawn.

Presently the Colonel began to fidget. He muttered something about its being a shame that many should be made to suffer for one. "I am afraid I must go," he said at last.

"You hardly expect me to press you to stay?"

"I shall double the guard."

"You may do as you please."

"And—and—your Highness may as well know it—they will have orders to hinder your egress at all costs."

"Had n't you better send for a file at once and have me shot without more fuss?"

Bonvalet shrugged his shoulders. "Monseigneur will think differently later on—when he recovers his senses," and, nodding slightly towards the unhappy young man, he left the room.

Napoleon lay back in a half stupor, hardly knowing whether to be glad or sorry that his quixotic intentions had been thus effectually frustrated. He heard them double—it sounded almost as if they were trebling—the guard underneath his window. He wondered what the sentinel who had been down below throughout the late scene must think of him; the groom who had brought

his horse and taken it away again; Carache, who, he did n't doubt, still had his eye glued to the keyhole. He wondered. But did not greatly care. His brain had settled into a lethargy of despair,—that anodyne of nature wherewith he had been endowed far beyond his legitimate share.

Lieutenant Mascout disturbed this comatose condition. The young man, also, was in but a gloomy frame of mind. So much appeared evident from the abrupt manner of his entry. The room might have belonged to a brother subaltern instead of being the shrine it was. His Highness, however, was far too limp to take umbrage. He lifted his head with excessive languor.

"Did you meet Bonvalet on your way here?" he asked.

Mascout replied in the negative.

"I am afraid that there is a deal of blood being shed over in the Place de l'Opera."

"Monseigneur is quite right," was the gloomy rejoinder; "there is."

Napoleon recommenced softly moaning. "Oh dear! oh dear! How can the government be so foolish! I am certain to win; even Car—, every one says so."

"I am not so sure of that. The report goes that Changarnier is out for the government, and that our men are being driven pell-mell from the Place de la Concorde. One of Douay's officers—young Müller of the Ninth Artillery Brigade—has come in wounded: he tells me that it is all they can do to hold their guns. The government have telegraphed for troops from Rouen, Amiens, Clermont, and I do n't know where else besides. If these can be brought up quickly enough, we shall assuredly get beaten."

"This is terrible news. Does Bonvalet know of this?"

"He'll hear it, when he gets back to the guard-room."

"Ought I not to be on my way to the Gare de l'Est?" Brisson said I was to be taken there, if things went against us."

"I fear you would find the government troops in possession," Mascout replied with a contempt that

was scarcely veiled. "They come that way from Chalons."

"What a fool I am," cried Napoleon wringing his hands. "I might have guessed this would result from trusting in Brisson. Would to heaven I had listened to De Morin and Hadamard! And for a certainty that drunken bully Bonvalet will no more think of conveying me to a place of safety than—than— The lot of you are traitors! When the time comes you will save your own precious skins. I shall be left here to be taken and shot. My God, I shall become the laughing-stock of Paris!"

"Take the matter into your own hands," Mascaut suggested.

"I do not follow you."

"Assume command in person."

"I should only be too glad," said his Highness, knowing how impossible it was.

"Müller says that our people are already commencing to ask where the Emperor is. If it came out that you were lurking in here, the effects would be disastrous. Brisson made a mistake at the very outset; most of us said so. Obviously, your Highness's proper place is at the head of your supporters. Take my advice, and assume it. You may yet retrieve the fortunes of the day."

"But Bonvalet?"

"What about him?"

"He won't let me go. I asked him only a few minutes before you came in, and he refused."

"I do not understand you. I think your Highness must be labouring under some strange delusion."

Napoleon gave a sickly smile. "I would I were. Brisson is in command, you see; and he has given Bonvalet his orders."

"He cannot interfere with your Highness."

"He does, all the same. They have put a double guard outside the house, with orders to shoot me if I stir. I am as much a prisoner as the President himself."

"Whew!" whistled the young officer; "I had no suspicion of this."

"Not that I do n't see the truth of your argument,"

continued Napoleon, feeling quite safe under the protection of the double sentry, and waxing warmer and warmer as he proceeded; "I am exceedingly anxious to get out of this ignoble position. But what *can* I do? You see for yourself, it is a case of 'force majeure.' "

Mascaut remained silent for a while, wrapped in thought.

"I daresay I could get round Bonvalet," he said, suddenly returning to life.

Napoleon had his own opinion upon that point.

"My dear lieutenant," he accordingly cried with great warmth, "I should be forever grateful."

"Your Highness's position *must* be at the head of your troops?"

"Unquestionably."

"Or, at all events, on Brisson's right hand? I know where the Colonel is to be found."

"But how to get to him, my dear young friend?"

"Suppose I undertook to show you the way?"

"I repeat, I should regard you as one of the chief contributors to my final success." The Prince was still cordial enough; but he was growing a trifle weary of all this.

"Very well, then," cried Mascaut flinging aside his doubts and scruples in a sudden burst of excitement, "follow me; I will take you to Brisson."

"What do you mean?" said Napoleon, with a startled look at the young man's flashing eyes.

"We need not go through the barracks at all. This house has a small door opening almost direct into the Rue Miroménil; we officers use it sometimes. Bonvalet knows nothing about it. Follow me!"

"But—" began Bonaparte dubiously.

"I can find the key. There is absolutely no danger. We shall have joined Brisson before they learn of our escape. Quick, quick, Monseigneur! you and I will save the day yet."

"But—" again from Bonaparte.

"I assure you there is not the least chance of our being seen. Remember, they are already calling for you, out of doors!"



For very shame Napoleon could hesitate no longer. He took up hat and stick, and with a sinking heart followed Mascout out of the room.

They had been gone but a few minutes, when Monsieur Carache stole in on tiptoe in pursuit of the matches and a little more refreshment.

## Chapter XI

The Lieutenant, stealing along on tiptoe, led Napoleon downstairs into the dim-lit hall. The front door lay open. Within the porch a sentinel stood motionless, wellnigh a figure cast in bronze. His back was towards them: his eyes, no doubt, were fixed on space; his ears alert after fresh disclosures from above. Mascout enjoined caution with a finger against his lip; while as for the Prince, he felt sorely tempted to crash everything conveniently detachable upon his person, quite regardless of its value, loudly to the floor.

They made their way safely through the hall, and entered a narrow passage terminating in the postern door Mascout had mentioned. Our hero was already commencing to curse its very existence. He did so all the more when he caught his first glimpse of the key considerably reposing in the lock, and felt hope crumbling away. Adolph proved a practised hand at these excursions. He went noiselessly to work. Within five minutes of their sudden resolve they found themselves underneath the stars, and compassed all around by a straggling court, which led, after many turns, into the Rue Miroménil.

The street stretched before them, silent and deserted. Not a soul appeared to be stirring. The Rue de Penthievre—they were careful, to cross it a long way above the barracks—was empty, as also the Faubourg St. Honoré, which they struck exactly opposite the British embassy. The ambassador and his wife, with Lord Mendril as a cheerful third behind them, stood at one of the windows chatting merrily together. It could not be that they knew the cause of the firing, which it was impossible they had not heard. Presuming they did, my lady might still have stood at the window, talking gaily

with some irresponsible and youthful friend, doubtlessly reminding herself of the days when she was wont to watch Brock's benefit from a balcony of the paternal mansion, but Lord Threpps assuredly would have been busy elsewhere. His presence helped to reassure Napoleon. There was a possibility, after all, of reaching the Place de la Concorde without having first to wade through gutters that ran with blood.

Things, however, thickened towards the bottom of the street. They came across companies of linesmen, all marching with fixed bayonets, the glint of which restored Napoleon's terror to its former dominion. At times, too, a squadron of dragoons galloped past them. The first such whirlwind, it may be remembered incidentally, nearly cause the Prince a fit. He clutched hold of his companion's arm, and expressed the fervent hope that they might not discover that they had committed a blunder. Mascut, in reply, pointed out that these troops were all bound in one and the same direction—towards the Place de la Concorde; and indeed, as far as it went, this sign was satisfactory enough. From it one might reasonably deduce that the fighting in these quarters—if fighting there had been at all—was now finished. The men, having paraded the streets in accordance with the earlier part of Brisson's instructions, were on their way to the common rendezvous. The attitude maintained by the civilian element helped out this comforting view. All sexes, all ages, all classes, stood about the footways and street corners, staring at the military with the completest apathy. No one interfered with the soldiers, and the soldiers interfered with no one. When a detachment came upon a crowded crossing, it waited till the way was clear. Half-battalions of cavalry cantered along, taking the whole road as they went, and carts and carriages drew uncomplainingly to one side. Godefroy's proclamations, too, which were scattered here, there, and everywhere with the least possible regard for vested interests, seemed to arouse scarcely more excitement. Men read them gravely and without comment, then turned to have a fresh look at the soldiers. The whole thing was eminently soothing to the nerves.

Napoleon—always so quick to fall under the sway of the prevailing tone—once more took heart of grace. His anxious face relaxed into a smile. He dropped his comrade's arm, and bore himself alone in the independent grandeur of his own self-sufficing strength. He remarked, more than once, with an engaging smile the entire absence of blood in the gutters or of other signs of carnage. He was still a trifle puzzled on the score of that terribly recurring roar of musketry which had so alarmed him; but he soon succeeded in convincing himself that it had been made with blank cartridges, and solely for the purposes of intimidation. The Engineer thought otherwise, but did not say so. Towards this last-named individual, Napoleon showed himself profuse in his gratitude. He declared, again and again, what a happy chance had lurked in Brisson's choice. "Without you, my dear Mascout, as my aide-de-camp, I should probably never have been here." He proceeded to expatiate at considerable length on the advantages of 'being here'; among which this was not the least important, that, at the moment of victory, the Colonel commanding in chief would not need send all the way to the Rue de Penthievre. "I shall be on the spot to take over the reins at once, and none, save a very few, will know anything about our ignominious sojourn in that abominable library."

"Gently," ventured Mascout, in reply. "You must not speak so loud. Above all, we ought not to hurry."

"Ah, I forgot."

They turned into the Rue Boissy d'Anglas as one of Douay's half-batteries thundered down it towards the Place de la Concorde. "Have they been in action?" queried Napoleon.

"No," replied Mascout, giving the guns a single glance; and his interlocutor could have sung aloud for joy.

But the crowd was becoming very much denser, as well as a great deal more demonstrative. Cries for and against the new Pretender rang out in heated altercation on every side. In one corner, three men—they looked like Godefroy's supers—were defending a proclamation

against half a dozen gens-d'armes. In another, some too-active adherent of the new order was already in the hands of the police, and being marched off to gaol. The Prince soon began to feel his undisclosed identity heavy upon him. So heavy, indeed, that it brought the sweat to his brow. He suggested a return to barracks; but Mascout would not hear of it. He looked back anxiously over his shoulder. The lieutenant urged him to keep his mind directed on their destination in front, making light of the surging, shouting mass of human beings that lay between.

"Come, give me your arm," said the Engineer; "and we we will carve our way through."

Napoleon obeyed mechanically. Mascout welded the weak grasp into his, and forged ahead. The attempt was unavailing. They could not advance a single step. Indeed, a sudden backward rush from the front swept them off their legs, carrying the two of them a substantial distance in quite an opposite direction. By a series of superhuman efforts Mascout dragged his master into the shelter of a convenient doorway.

"This will never do," he muttered uneasily. "We *must* reach the Place, somehow."

"Let us return to the barracks," pleaded Napoleon.

"No, no, we must get forward, now we have come so far."

"But Brisson may have already sent for me."

"All the more reason why we should reach him with the least possible delay. We will wait here a minute or so, perhaps a detachment may be passing. It can escort us."

"And I shall be recognized and killed."

"Not so loud, I do implore you. As it is, your—you are beginning to attract attention."

No detachment passed, however. And presently Mascout decided to make another attempt, keeping this time a good way to the left, and approaching the Place from the Rue de Rivoli. "Come along," he said unceremoniously.

"But there has been fighting—bloodshed!" exclaimed Napoleon, with a terrified look at a couple of



sergents-de-ville with bleeding faces who stumbled past them at that minute.

"Obviously," Mascout drily responded.

Their first step into the Place de la Madeleine showed them where. A wagon belonging to the field-ambulance was drawn up a little way to the left of the church, while half a dozen bearers moved in couples—like vultures, Bonaparte thought—about the open space. Across the mouth of the Rue Royale stretched the débris of a demolished barricade. The overturned omnibus which had formed its centrepiece was now smashed to atoms, and wellnigh level with the ground. A squad of engineers from Mascout's regiment guarded the remains.

Pontécoulant, Minister of the Interior, stood hatless and forlorn upon the steps of the portico. A small group of adherents were gathered round the great man's feet. All looked ruefully in the direction of the splintered vehicle. Poor fellows, like their leader they were mostly more or less hatless and dishevelled. Not a few still had hold of some useless weapon,—a broken sword or a musket with its barrel torn and twisted out of recognition. By way of background, Godefroy's sacrilegious proclamations papered the fluted Corinthian columns; it looked as though the church were up for auction.

"Oh!" said the Lieutenant; "so Pontécoulant was the driver. Well, our men do n't appear to have been very impressed."

"They ought to have taken him prisoner," put in Napoleon. "He will only start another barricade somewhere else."

"Let him. We can bowl it over again. Come along, Monseigneur, our troubles are at an end. My men will pass us through."

"Look," urged the Prince, "he has begun an harangue. Oh, dear! there 'll be more blood spilt."

"They won't be such fools. Come along, I beg of you. Brisson is probably waiting for us."

But Napoleon would not advance a step into the arena which lay between the church and the barricade.

"Don't you see?" he gasped a second time, drawing back under the shelter of the ambulance. "They

will be firing directly. My heavens! What *does* the fellow mean by it?"

For Monsieur Pontécoulant, having spent a considerable time in glowering at the military from between his folded arms and frowning brow,—something after the manner of a magnified Mr. Simon Tappertit,—had now proceeded to reprisals. To begin with, he shook his fist menacingly at all whom it might concern.

It apparently did not concern Brisson's Engineers. Not, indeed, that they could not see him; for the intervening space, it will be remembered, is small, and always well lighted. Doubtless their orders were to take notice of nothing short of brickbats; accordingly, this little outpost stood at ease among the wreckage, gazing forth upon Pontécoulant without the least emotion. Most of them, in all probability, were thinking about the new ruler, whether he was likely to go one better than his predecessor, and make it half a bottle of wine each man.

"Cowards!" shouted Pontécoulant.

"Cowards!" echoed his followers, looking the while into the master's face, like faithful dogs.

"Do n't lurk behind that omnibus," continued Pontécoulant, rather figuratively than otherwise, "come out and fight!"

"Come out and fight!" chorused the others.

"Produce your Pretender! Produce him, I say! If he is man enough to do it, let him step forth into the arena, and I will plunge my—my—" looking askance at his umbrella—"my knife into his breast. Cæsar!"

The concentrated bitterness which Pontécoulant threw into this epithet was not without its effect upon our hero. "Let us get away from here," he murmured uneasily.

"I am ready. They are men belonging to my own company. It is a most fortunate accident."

"No, no; not to the barricade," pleaded Napoleon, hanging back. "Pontécoulant will certainly catch us before we can reach them. His people are in the mood to tear us limb from limb. Do you not hear what he says?"

"I wish they would put a bullet into his windpipe,"

muttered Mascout savagely. "There is no danger, provided we keep well in the shadow of the houses."

"In that case, we may very likely get shot. Please, not the barricade! Let us creep round by the back of the church, and get that way into the Rue de Rivoli. It was our original intention; let us follow it, I beg of you."

"Cæsar!" began Pontécoulant anew, with a gulp which clearly denoted the last earthly remains of a cough-lozenge, "come out into the open and fight like a man. You are not on the throne yet, do n't think it. You have collared Monsieur le President, and Carache; but you have n't got Pontécoulant, and you never will. Who is it that stands in your way? Pontécoulant does, the Minister of the Interior!" The voice hurtling this defiance grew louder and louder, till at last it dominated the whole Place, penetrating also some way up the boulevards, and drawing therefrom a considerable addition to its original audience.

"Citizens!" rang out the clarion note again, after another imperfectly digested jujube, "shall we suffer ourselves to be intimidated by half a dozen hired assassins? No—a thousand million times no! Back to the barricade!"

"Back to the barricade!" cried the citizens with one voice. No one moved.

"The villains have captured Monsieur. Carache—the fearless, lion-hearted Carache—is in their hands. I was present when they came to seize him, and bear him off to the fetid dungeon, where he now lies. 'Pontécoulant,' he said to me hurriedly, 'this may mean death. Good-bye, old friend,'"—the Minister gulped down a sob,—"'Good-bye, old friend. Into your hands I commend our dear country. Let Paris swim in blood before she be suffered to prostitute herself to the yoke of Cæsar! Also, be good enough to look after my wife and little girl.' My poor Carache," mused Pontécoulant, in a pathetic aside, which, by the way, was bellowed out at the same high pitch as the rest of his harangue. "My poor Carache, where art thou now? Dead, perhaps? Yes, dead! The angel-face is wreathed in marbled immortality; the silver trumpet-tones are still. But, citi-

zens, be not afraid. I am left. Paris *shall* swim in blood before I give her over to this English Bonaparte. You may also rest assured that I will look after Carache's wife and little girl."

"Vive Pontécoulant!"

"You may well applaud me. For to-night, at least, and until this insurrection is quelled, I am in the position of dictator. Back to the barricade, I say! Let us recapture our omnibus! Citizens, the eyes of Europe are upon you."

"Do you lead us, Monsieur," suggested a voice from among the rapidly increasing crowd at his feet, "and we will follow."

"Oh, no," said Pontécoulant, shrinking back into the shadow of the fluted columns, "I am bound to reserve myself for higher things."

"But it is useless going for that omnibus," repeated the voice. "It is smashed to smithereens."

"Are there no more Madeleine buses about?" inquired Pontécoulant, peering into the gas-lamps on either side.

"The last bus has gone; you will have to take a cab," shouted a humourist.

"No ribaldry, I beg," cried Pontécoulant sternly. "Is there nothing we can make use of?"

"The ambulance," hazarded one or two.

"No, we must n't take that. Let us treat our enemies humanely."

"These fools will go on all night," burst out the Lieutenant. "I do not mean to stay here another minute."

"But not the open, I implore you. Listen, listen—Pontécoulant and I have met frequently; I honestly believe he knows who I am. If we are seen, I am lost. I shall be killed to a certainty. Round by the boulevards, I entreat!"

"No," replied Mascut, with an imperative gesture, "I dare not delay another minute. I ought not to have brought you. God knows, they may be already waiting for us. I shall get all the blame. Be brave; come straight across to the barricade. No one will notice."

Without further ado he took Napoleon by the arm,

and advanced boldly out of the shadow of the ambulance into the open space which lies between the church and the Rue Royale.

But they did not know their man. Pontécoulant had spotted Mascaut's uniform in the space of a single second. He broke off in the first word of a fresh exhortation, and pointed towards them.

"Hullo," said he, "what is that hired assassin doing out here? He is a spy."

"Run!" whispered Mascaut, but just too late. The crowd had already surged down upon them, like some great sea. It caught them up, and swept them right forward to Pontécoulant's feet. The Minister placed his umbrella against his hip as though it were a sceptre, and prepared to pass sentence.

"What are you doing this side of the omnibus?" he asked severely of Mascaut.

"To the lamp-post with the traitors!" cried some among the crowd.

"Leave me to deal with them," said Pontécoulant magnificently. The Minister was clean-shaven, and red and bloated, like a butcher or a successful lawyer. With his gingham poised upon his right hip, he looked regality itself.

"What are you doing here?" he repeated; "answer, bandit!"

Lieutenant Mascaut, with admirable promptitude, had already decided upon a course of action. He drew himself up to his full height, and looked Pontécoulant straight in the face with an air of great disdain.

"I do not know who you may be," he was beginning, when a man in the crowd shouted out that he had the same uniform as the pigs at the barricades.

"That settles it," said Pontécoulant. "You are spies. I am dictator: the Republic looks to me for safety. I have no time to waste over spies. Where are the sergents-de-ville? I saw some only a moment ago."

Half a dozen forlorn and puny policemen were pushed forward to Pontécoulant's feet. All of them, without a doubt, had long ago retired into private life. They



resembled sheep without a shepherd, wearing the woe-begone expression which marks the face of that useful animal when publicity is thrust upon it.

"The little fat man first, if you please," cried the dictator. "Now, then, malefactors." In obedience to this command, four of the sergents-de-ville hurried up the steps and closed round the stupefied Napoleon. They were recovering their agreeable habits under the influence of business, hustling our hero with quite unnecessary violence.

"Lock him up anywhere," shouted the Minister. "Make way for the Republic!"

And with this send-off the little procession started on its way, Napoleon well in the middle, bewildered and quite passive. His brain had sunk into semi-somnolence. He heard the corporal in charge mutter to his companions something about the *violon* in the Chapelle quarter; but he took no notice. He felt conscious that they were moving northward, steadily northward, with their backs forever turned upon the Place de la Concorde. But it did not add to the bitterness of his spirit. Perhaps it could not. The One Hour of life was speeding away,—and how! Side by side, in sharply contrasted pictures, whose framing was his anguish-laden heart, he saw Brisson's great army drawn up and waiting to acclaim him Emperor, and these four undersized thief-catchers, who held him tight. He compared the gilded throne, the ermined robes, delights almost within his grasp, with the Round House which had actually grasped him. Above all, he contrasted the to-morrow which he might have had—which any other man in his position *would* have had—with the real fate that was in store. This wretched blunder of his meant the sacrifice of all the promised pomp and wealth and power; substituting for them the ruin of his followers and total self-obliteration. In any case, the latter. For, if Brisson managed to keep firm hold of victory, despite his own compulsory defection, then Prince Victor would reap the benefit—Prince Victor, or that unwholesome Felix. Men do not wait very long in sudden emergencies. When the author of a *coup d'état* chooses to disappear within the recesses

of an unknown Round House at the psychological moment, the next best man is taken. To-morrow he would slink forth into the daylight, to be received by mankind with thunders of Gargantuan laughter. As for the rest of life—but he really could not take contemplation beyond the next twelve hours. The old days in Pimlico, when the impossible was forever dogging his actual condition, had nothing in them so terrible as this. Like the gentleman in the "Jackdaw of Rheims" he cursed every one and every thing,—Brisson, for having left him at home; Mascout, for bringing him out; himself, for staying at home and coming out. The merest trifle which could be said to have contributed to this fiasco became anathema. The dinner at Jervis's Restaurant, Lohengrin, the night on the Embankment—if a night in the open, anywhere, can be called a trifle. Indeed, this all-embracing combination extended to life itself. While round it, and above and below, there floated the listless apathy of utter despair.

Their northward course carried them by degrees into regions that were comparatively deserted. The firing had ceased a considerable time. The centres were being choked by an ever-increasing multitude, curious to know who had been fighting and who had won.

The farther, too, the sergeants-de-ville got away from Pontécoulant, the more abrupt became their manners. It was quite evident they thought small-beer of their captive; and they contributed their little mite to his discomfort with an abundance of zeal.

"Walk up, you rebel," growled the Corporal, kicking Napoleon savagely. "If only we hurry up with this fool, we can get back and see some of the fun."

"Devil take your fun," said the left-hand man behind, "I want none of it. Give me bed and a pipe at this time of night."

"You are a lazy dog. Promotion does n't come to 'lay-abeds.'"

"No; it goes to the men with pretty wives."

"Do n't be insolent," said the Corporal, jogging Bonaparte's arm.

"You are right," put in the Corporal's companion in

front,—Hauptman was his name,—“and the Corporal here knows it as well as any one.”

“I won’t stand rudeness from you, at all events,” said the officer in charge, turning fiercely on Hauptman, and giving the Prince another jog. “You two are lazy hounds, always thinking about your sleep and your stomachs. Both of you like to believe that promotion is n’t for personal merit. That’s the way with all you lazy men.” He appealed to the fourth, who brought up the rear, upon Napoleon’s right: “You agree with me, do you not?” But the other shook his head.

The Prince began to see the faintest glimpse of daylight. He roused himself from his lethargy.

“Suppose I could tell you of a means of promotion for those without pretty wives?” he commenced in a hesitating voice. He looked to be rudely silenced, and was agreeably surprised.

Three of them softened perceptibly and at once. The left-hand man behind said plaintively:

“Ah, we should like to hear of that.”

“Nothing simpler,” replied his Highness. “By now the new Emperor is proclaimed. I do n’t mind telling you, I am one of his chief adherents. Release me, and I promise you not one of you shall be forgotten.”

Two of them became violent Bonapartists on the spot. Hauptman remained doubtful. The Corporal was altogether hostile.

“What do you say, comrades?” cried the left-hand man. “I myself am perfectly willing.”

“You shall all be commissaries, with a handsome present into the bargain,” murmured the tempter.

“If only we could believe him,” groaned Hauptman.

“That’s exactly what we can’t do,” snapped the Corporal. “Keep your mouth shut,” roughly, to Napoleon. “I am in charge here, and I won’t have you tampering with my men. I warn you, if you try to escape, I will run you through the body.”

“You think yourself no end of a fellow,” grumbled Hauptman, “simply because you happen to be a corporal. If we make up our minds to let this gentleman go, we sha’ n’t permit you to stop us.”

"Hauptman, I shall report you, if you don't hold your tongue." With these words, the Corporal drew his sword. And that clinched the attitude which he had assumed. Napoleon was hurried along at a redoubled pace, not another word being said about his tempting offer.

But aid was at hand—aid from an altogether unlooked-for quarter. The silence, so long surrounding them, fell precipitately before a confused murmur of voices which grew as they approached the Gare du Nord, until it outrivalled Babel itself. And an abrupt turn brought them out on top of some forty-five to fifty ruffians who were advancing in open order over the entire breadth of the road.

These no sooner caught sight of our hero and his escort than they dropt what, it seems, had been merely a desultory conversation on current topics, and commenced shouting at the top of their voices:

"Vive l'Empereur Napoleon IV! Vive Bonaparte!"

The Prince started into life again. He braced himself for a final effort. So did the Corporal. "Draw!" the latter whispered to his companions. They paid no heed.

"Help!" shouted the captive, "help! in the Emperor's name!" His eyes lit upon the unmistakable form,—the round, unwieldy, Falstaff figure, which, though seen only once, could never be forgotten.

"Godefroy! Godefroy! You know who I am. Rescue me, I pray!"

"Who calls me?" said the claqueur, shouldering his way into the little cortège without the least regard for the Corporal's sword; "why, bless me if it ain't little Bonaparte himself! Come on, lads!" and Godefroy, who was a man of action, sent the policeman sprawling to one side. The three others fell away readily enough. In this manner, then, our hero passed at one step from the depths of despair to the command of fifty enthusiastic, if unkempt, individuals, who flocked round and commenced to stare at him with open mouths.

Anatole Godefroy was not among the least surprised. He surveyed Napoleon from head to foot.

"How the deuce did you get into this plight?" he asked abruptly. Bonaparte was on the point of retailing the whole history, but the other stopped him.

"Is Brisson beaten?"

"No. I am inclined to think that he has won."

"Then come along men: before you have lost thrones through dawdling."

He motioned the Prince to the place of honour upon his right, giving the signal at the same minute to resume the onward march towards the boulevards and the Place de la Concorde.

They followed the route which Napoleon had lately traversed in captivity. The streets grew more crowded as they advanced. And his nerves, hardly equal to such sudden changes, either of fortune or of attendant circumstances, tightened by leaps and bounds. The gang of organized partisans was making noise enough to wake the dead. "Vive Bonaparte! Vive l'Empereur!" "A bas La Republique!" they shouted with wearisome iteration. Soon, too, the procession fell in with other gangs, all equally demonstrative and unclean.

"I have done my work well?" suggested the Prince's stout companion, complacently smiling.

"Too well," was the reply which the latter's heart tempted him to make.

He had a holy horror of anything in the nature of bathos. What with organized hordes of claqueurs and legitimately inquisitive citizens, his army—a band no longer—was swelling at every corner. Suppose they should reach the heart of the city only to find it in the hands of government troops! He shuddered at the sight of their ridiculous figures—he, with Godefroy as his knight behind him.

This fear was not without its effect upon his pace. "Hurry, hurry!" Godefroy urged more than once, "we still have a long way to go." The Prince sometimes suggested sending a scout in advance, but the other always laughed at the idea. "Not the slightest use," would be the invariable reply, "we must go in and win, whatever may have happened to Brisson."

The crush in the boulevards was terrible.



Thousands upon thousands were hurrying forward to the selfsame goal. An unnatural silence brooded over this close-packed throng. The mercenaries still continued shouting; but the effect proved truly piteous among the myriads who simply looked at them and wondered.

There was no anger, no signs of hostility against his cause, no enthusiasm for the Republic,—nothing except one all-pervading bewilderment, coupled with an universal desire to get forward and see what was actually happening.

Napoleon blushed to find himself in such disreputable company among a crowd so silent and respectable. But his phalanx went boisterously forward,—forging ahead slowly but surely, like some great ship that fights on against heavy seas.

Godefroy's "get-up" upon this memorable occasion was likewise of a kind to attract attention. His substantial form and well-worn broadcloth were tied with waist-belts and cross-belts and shoulder-belts and satchel-thongs and sabretache-thongs, and thongs of all sorts and shapes and sizes. Wherever he could hang a thong, he hung one. And each strap had its purpose, inasmuch as he carried field-glasses, a brandy-flask, a leathern sandwich-case, a folded overcoat, and what looked suspiciously like a second pair of pantaloons. His weapons, moreover, betokened a catholicity of taste highly creditable to a law-abiding citizen. A Roman dirk, garrisoned with the cavalry sabretache aforesaid, and which had obviously done duty in "Anthony and Cleopatra," wobbled upon his hip. Two pistols of a blunderbuss pattern, from "Thermidor," adorned his waist. A net—whether for his enemies or edibles it is not in the power of this chronicle to say—balanced the dirk upon the other side. His Wellingtons were of enormous dimensions, and one of them carried a brass spur which jingled. The Panama hat which crowned this interesting figure had a conscript's ticket—also a "property"—inserted in the broad black silk band. He might have been on his way to Moscow, or marauding across the Rhine.

And so they reached the Madeleine. Monsieur Pontécoulant no longer dominated the Place. The little outpost guarding the mouth of the Rue Royale was withdrawn, and that thoroughfare abandoned to a multitude denser and more silent than any they had yet encountered. It covered every inch of ground, omnibus and all.

Godefroy ordered a halt in front of the church. He wanted it badly. He shifted his belts and mopped his brow, which was glistening under the gaslight, and ascended to the portals to have a look along the Rue Royal, and came down therefrom with a groan, half sincere, half comic, and went up again to have another look, this time through his field-glasses, and redescended as depressed as ever. He then proceeded to refresh himself with sandwiches and neat brandy, pressing both upon his companion with a warmth which grew in direct proportion to Napoleon's resolve not to take nourishment of any kind.

"Now, lads," he merely remarked, when this repast was satisfactorily concluded, "on we go."

The thing was easier said than done. They flung themselves in one great mass, after the fashion of a battering-ram, upon the closely knit throng which blocked their passage. They shoved, and strained, and swore, and shouted,—at the outset with only the slenderest results. However, in matters of this kind, the first inch is everything. Once in motion, the effort is to stop, not to go forward; accordingly they went forward, fighting and cursing to the uttermost. Of the thousands present, only Godefroy and the Prince himself had space wherein to move. Their bodyguard took care of that. The narrow circle round them never lessened. Whatever the condition of their minds, they now moved forward with all the outward composure of Egyptian princesses.

On and on they went, through denser masses, and amid a silence growing ever more terrible, until they were rewarded by the first glimpse of their destination. The sea of human beings, wherein they were battling, extended as far as the Ministry of Marine. At that

point a breakwater, in the shape of some thirty cuirassiers, effectually barred all further progress; and Napoleon, catching the glint of the helmets, felt, with a burst of joy, that his task was wellnigh ended. The others saw it as well. They fought with redoubled vigour; it proved necessary enough; for the wave which guards the harbour bar is always the most formidable. This caught them, and was like to smash and scatter them; but they clung together with wonderful tenacity. A final wrench landed their passenger in safety.

The soldiers of the detachment, save for a few, busy backing their horses into the crowd, sat dejected and motionless. The lieutenant commanding, who had stationed himself at the corner of the Ministry, kept rising in his stirrups to peer anxiously in the direction of the fountains. Twice did Napoleon observe him sink back from his attitude with a gesture of disgust, which probably did not fail of its effect upon the troopers. Beyond them, the Place was packed with infantry. These, their white faces in strong relief against the night, were turned towards the Prince, and one and all wore the look of weariness that follows hope deferred.

Godefroy summed up the position in a single sentence: "But for me," said he, comfortably, "the curtain would have fallen without the prima donna. Back, boys! we can manage alone now. Monseigneur, keep well behind me."

With these directions, he drew Napoleon out of the crowd, and made straight for the lieutenant. The troopers seemed too dejected to take any notice; and the two men were almost as close to the young officer as the head of his own horse before he saw them.

"Well, Lieutenant," Godefroy said, softly, "here we are!"

The cuirassier gave a single hurried glance in their direction. It was sufficient. His face broke at once into a laugh of happiness. He plucked his sword from its scabbard, and waving it high aloft, shouted:

"The Emperor!"

"The Emperor!" the battalion opposite took up the cry, and passed it on behind them, and to the left and

right. "The Emperor!" rolled back like thunder from beyond the Obelisk, the Avenue des Champs Élysée, and the Cours de la Reine. The excitement, so long pent up, resulted in a scene of indescribable enthusiasm. Those who had sight of the lost one did everything short of break their ranks to testify to their devotion, while those who had not, nearly committed the same unpardonable breach of discipline in their desire to be equally favoured.

Meanwhile a corporal of horse had dismounted at a sign from the Lieutenant, and now stood holding his stirrup in readiness for Napoleon. And the latter, who was quite dazed by the noise, and the serried ranks hovering among shadows on every side, suffered himself to be hoisted into the saddle.

"Come, Monseigneur," the officer said laconically, "Colonel Brisson *will* be rejoiced to see you."

And then for a time, with the Prince at least, all things passed into dreamland. He was dimly conscious of being carried along in the Lieutenant's wake through lines upon lines of shouting men. Their cries,—*"Vive Napoléon IV!"* for the most part,—which were absolutely unintermittent, sounded in his ears like the far-away roar of the sea. The splash of fountains mingled. So, too, the silence which, dazed as he was, he knew brooded over remaining Paris. Presently he found himself underneath the Obelisk and among a throng of officers. They were shouting with the rest, waving their swords and helmets and képis, stretching out to grasp his hand, which he extended with equal impassiveness to all who wanted it, and a few of them even patting him upon the back, in an excess of delight. Indeed, he only recovered consciousness when he discovered Brisson leaning forward half across his horse, with glistening eyes, clasping both his hands in his.

## Chapter XII

"At last!" said the Colonel, with a sigh of immense relief; "we thought you were never coming. Sire, this escapade of yours has nearly ruined us."

"I am sorry," murmured Napoleon contritely. Nevertheless the fact that the first words addressed to him as Emperor contained a reproof did not pass unnoticed. Without attempt at rejoinder, he turned to survey the faces of those gathered round him.

Most proved familiar. Klein and Douay were there, the latter evidently well satisfied with the results obtained from his new guns. General Bréheville also, neat as ever, and Brigadier Marchmont, who, though he shouted with the loudest, hardly yet looked altogether convinced. Colonel Bonvalet of Cuirassiers made a fifth, besides being the most conspicuous figure present, as he sat, mum and glum, scowling resentfully at his sovereign lord, newly arrived in more respects than one. His brow of thunder caught Brisson's eye. "Look," the latter continued, the faintest vestige of a smile passing across his face, "the Colonel there, has been half over Paris to find you. We were beginning to think seriously about proclaiming Felix."

"I am truly sorry," the other repeated, leaving the scrutiny of the staff for a wider view, which almost drove him back into his former dazed condition. To his unaccustomed eye it seemed as if the whole French army—not alone the Paris garrison—were assembled to acclaim him Emperor. Bonvalet's Cuirassiers and another mounted regiment, that he took for dragoons, though not altogether certain, occupied the lines nearest at hand. Beyond them, interminable columns of infantry stretched far along the Avenue des Champs



Élysées, becoming lost at last in the mingled blur of illuminated darkness. Leftwards, towards the river, the sight of serried ranks rose tier above tier as far as eye could reach.

All the while, too, the shouting continued, and the noise was deafening. The period of expectancy had been too long drawn out to suffer the welcome to be anything else. The men roared and bellowed, and waved their arms in a frantic demonstration that promised to be endless; and when, presently, Colonel Brisson felt that the time had come for a renewal of silence, he found it no easy job to get it.

But, thanks to indefatigable aides-de-camp, who spurred forth in all directions, it came at last. To Napoleon it proved even more oppressive that the foregoing uproar. For one thing, it disclosed the unpleasant fact that the civilian element, which looked on from the Rue Royale, was ominously still. He tried to comfort himself with the assurance that it must be due to one of Brisson's messengers. But the Colonel dispelled the illusion.

"Those pigs do n't seem over-enthusiastic," said he.

"No," was the dubious response.

"Well, they do n't signify one way or the other. I congratulate your Majesty," he added presently, by way of afterthought, "on the complete success of your plans."

"We shall first have to hear what the provinces say," Marchmont murmured from behind.

"I am not frightened about them."

"Clisserole *will* be sick," simpered General Bréheville; "and the President too. I wonder how the dear old fellow takes it. Bonvalet, you can tell us."

"No, I can't," said the Cuirassier brusquely. "Brisson," turning to the first speaker, "I do n't see the force of prolonging this business indefinitely."

"That is for me to say," Brisson rejoined.

"I know, I know. All the same, the men have been introduced to his Majesty and have had a good look at him, and it is high time they got back to hold the streets and railway stations."

"You must be good enough to take your orders from me."

"Thanks, I've got them already," replied Bonvalet, not in the least abashed. "So, if you are quite done with the Emperor, I will convey him back to barracks. That is, provided he do n't prefer to return the way he came," and Bonvalet glanced scornfully at the Prince.

The prospect did not by any means commend itself to Napoleon. He suffered himself to be betrayed into a plaintive appeal:

"Oh, I am not to go back to those horrible barracks, am I?"

Bréheville smiled significantly for the Brigadier's benefit, who took no notice, but went on biting his nails. As for Colonel Brisson, he made no answer.

Napoleon repeated the question.

"That was the idea," the Engineer said at last, after a prolonged pause. "Your Majesty needs rest."

"Not more than any one else. I do not want to lie sleeping while others are working for me. Indeed, I could not sleep. I want to remain in the saddle."

Bonvalet gave a grunt of impatience.

"The *coup d'état* is not ended yet," said Brisson very gently; "and until it is, your Majesty ought to obey orders."

"Meanwhile we are wasting precious time."

"Be quiet, Bonvalet," from Bréheville. "First of all, sire, we propose that you should address the troops. After that, you positively must go home, as Brisson bids you."

This was a new horror. The young man looked about in absolute consternation. "How can I possibly make myself heard by these thousands?" he gasped.

Bréheville speedily reassured him. "We don't expect that of you," he remarked with unvarnished condescension. "If a couple of regiments or so manage to catch what you are saying, it will be ample; we shall feel more than satisfied."

"But what in the world am I to talk about?" queried Napoleon, not yet sufficiently recovered to remember that talking was among his strongest points.

"Oh, the usual thing. Say that your sole motive in this business is the glory of our dear France."

"Also," Marchmont hazarded, "that you mean to retire, unless the country is genuinely willing to have you."

Bréheville brushed the other aside with a gesture of contempt. "Come, Brisson," he said simply, "lead off. We have no time to spare. Bonvalet was right just now."

The Colonel in command rode forth from under the shelter of the Obelisk. His staff, with Napoleon in their midst, kept close behind him; and in such order the little cavalcade passed along the front of Bonvalet's regiment. The men showed some desire to recommence cheering. But their chief quickly silenced them with objurgations which carried the leaders through silent ranks long after they had left the Cuirassiers.

It turned out that a hollow square of infantry, drawn up in a corner of the "place" and round one of the statues (which Napoleon did n't recognize, but hoped was Strasburg), was to be "*urbs et orbs*" for the reception of his remarks. His companions brought him so far; then drew back and left him solitary at the foot of the pedestal, with nothing in his mind but the overwhelming desire to be home in bed. Whip himself as he would, he could not rise to the occasion. During that evening, he had been in turns nervous, impatient, restless, nervous again, dazed, and absolutely alarmed; but he could not get hold of the merest spark of heroic excitement that should pass from him in a torrent of glowing words to galvanize his immediate audience into mad enthusiasm, and thus infect the thousands beyond, as well as that moody, sinister Rue Royale, which was forever in his thoughts. How could he possibly throw himself heart and soul into the present situation?—for he was quite unable to realize it, and it seemed to him the vaguest, most fleeting of dreams. The result might have been different had he had any part in the actual fighting, and lost an arm, say, or a leg; or made some other tangible sacrifice by way of exchange for the crown which every one assured him was now his.

So he suffered his tongue to carry him languidly into the midst of those generalities and commonplaces tradition prescribes as befitting these occasions. His audience did not help him. In truth, they could not: his platitudes were not of a sort to kindle enthusiasm. He went on and on through chilling silence, and got deeper and deeper into the mire. His only accompaniment—not exactly a reassuring one—came from the horses behind him, who began to fidget under their restless riders.

With a single striking exception, jejuneness is the badge of all monarchs; and Napoleon, had he been firmly established, might, by this performance only, have shown his fitness to be numbered among the brotherhood of viceregents, and have won the usual loyal applause. But he was n't firmly established, so—so he went on and on through chilling silence and got deeper and deeper into the mire. It is on such occasions that your orator finds the value of insensate things. Our hero, in the midst of an interminable sentence about abiding by the verdict of a plebiscite—a sentence which he dare not finish, even if he had known how to—cast his eyes above him, as a relief, perhaps, from the hollow square, and caught a full view of the statue, which he hoped was Strasburg, but did n't recognize. That was enough. The plebiscite was abruptly abandoned and a more promising topic taken in its stead.

"Soldiers!" he cried, with a gesture not altogether ineffective, "Strasburg looks down upon you. In her stone image, under the shadow of which we stand, the city hears you. I can well believe that at this moment her citizens are wakeful and watching, knowing naught indeed of what is happening here, but moved by some vague restlessness which whispers them, Deliverance is at hand! It is your cry of triumph, comrades, passing over the land amid the stillness of this summer night to stir their hearts. I have no more to say. The statue has borne its drear significance too long without result. Too long, also, has it been meaningless."

What need to add that the air was once more rent in twain, even before Napoleon had arrived at his paradox-

ical conclusion? He was glad enough of it. He was delighted to have finished, and rejoiced at the lucky inspiration which had enabled him to finish so well. He listened complacently to the cries of "Vive Napoléon IV!" "Vive l'Empereur!" "Vive Bonaparte!" which rose on every side.

But when all this personal adulation gave way, as it did before very long, to open shouts for the "Revanche," the Prince drew back. His words had been a direct incentive; but he himself, at all events, had not heard them, and now that he was face to face with their interpretation, he did not like it. Presently a few, braver than the rest, began to shout "À Berlin!" Their lead was soon generally followed. And then for the first time that evening he entered into the actualities of his position. At last the thing was real. The dream-mists had floated away.

He looked up at the buildings along the northern side; he surveyed so much of the "Place" itself as the troops and the darkness permitted, and bethought him that this fair quarter was earnest of his inheritance. The thousands that surrounded him—were they not his servants? Before long, if things went well, his name would be the lodestar of their loyalty. The parsimony which lurks somewhere in most men's breasts rose to the surface. These things were very, very good; why should he put them to the hazard of a laborious war? Hence he prayed with all fervour that, though these cries of menace reached Alsace-Lorraine, they might not find their way across the Rhine.

It was now once more Brisson's turn. His aides-de-camp scattered with fresh messages; the hollow square dissolved; and soon Bonaparte was the only man present not on the move. And *he* did n't remain so for long. Colonel Bonvalet, a squadron of his faithful Cuirassiers behind him, sat fidgetting in his saddle, a little distance off, watching our hero with malevolent eye. Brisson gave the desired signal. He advanced, literally swallowed Napoleon, and trotted him off in the direction of those hated barracks.

He—Bonvalet, that is—was evidently of a brooding



and resentful disposition. No sooner were they clear of the press, than he ordered his men to change their trot into a gallop. The suddenness of this manœuvre took Napoleon completely by surprise. In the Avenue Gabriel he lost his stirrups: Bonvalet noticed it and increased the pace. Outside the Élysée he lost his hat: the troop only closed tighter round him, without slackening in the least degree. And thus, hatless and breathless, clinging surreptitiously—but, all the same, for dear life—to his saddle-bow, he was swept into the barrack-yard.

Even then Bonvalet was not satisfied. He whipped Napoleon off his horse, and conducted him between two troopers back to Brisson's residence. They accompanied their prisoner to the door itself of the well-known chamber, parting with him only on the threshold. "Your Majesty may be interested to learn that Mascout will be shot," Bonvalet said grimly. And that was his good-night.

With one foot in the room and one still outside, Napoleon decided to go straight to bed. But his plans lay at the knees of the gods—or, to speak more accurately, at the knees of Carache. For the Prime Minister had taken advantage of the Prince's absence to make himself at home. He had had a second supper, as the viands amply showed; then had wheeled the table to the right-about, and was now seated in a comfortable arm-chair directly underneath the hanging-lamp, composedly reading De Morny's book. It interested him. He must have heard the clatter of Bonaparte's guard, Bonvalet's gentle farewell, and the noise caused by the former's entry. Nevertheless, he did not look up, but pursued his course with added eagerness, as if fearful of having to break off in the midst of a most interesting passage.

The new-comer behaved like any less exalted person, and coughed. Carache fled along the printed lines in frantic haste. He skipped fifty pages, skimmed the contents of fifty more, tearing himself away at last only with the most obvious effort, and sighing heavily as he laid the book to one side.

"Ah, Monseigneur!" said he, "so you are back. Well, how have you been getting on?"

Napoleon was commencing to feel tired, and wanted to get to bed in the shortest time possible, so he put the question to one side with a show of complete indifference. "To confess the truth, I do not know."

"But, Monseigneur!" exclaimed Carache. "Why, I thought you went out into the streets to see for yourself?"

"So I did, and have only just returned. Unfortunately, my aide-de-camp and I were able to learn nothing. It was impossible to get even within sight of the Place de la Concorde."

"So you returned?"

"So we returned."

At this point the Premier, who had already vacated his arm-chair, offered it to Napoleon. The latter needed something far more rest-giving; but, for all that, he accepted. Carache sank into a second, and smiled across at the Prince with great sweetness.

"So you came back?" he repeated.

"Yes, I came back. Let me also tell you, Monsieur, that I am very tired. The day has been a terribly exhausting one. I don't think I shall wait for the result; really I don't."

Carache raised both hands in mild expostulation. "Surely your Highness would not like to be roused from your bed in the small hours of the morning. Picture the degradation,—to be carried off to Ham in one's night—night-garments!"

"That is not very likely," and his Highness smiled faintly.

"I would not be so sure. Pontécoulant is a rough diamond. If the government wins, he won't give you long for your preparations."

Napoleon gave a yawn of unconquerable weariness: "At any rate, I will chance it."

The Prime-Minister straightway shifted his ground.

"Whose voice was that bidding you good-night, outside the door?"

"Colonel Bonvalet's."

"*He* does not appear to have any doubts concerning the result."

"Oh," cried the other, with a little burst of half-comic impatience, "I am not going to beat about the bush any longer. I told you I did not know, simply because I wanted to get to bed and not be put through my paces. I am sure, Monsieur, you must have been bred a lawyer; you cross-examine so ferociously. As a matter of fact, I *have* been on the Place de la Concorde. The troops hold it, and indeed the entire city. Brisson tells me that they have met with little or no opposition. At the present moment, Paris is quite tranquil. If only the provinces show themselves equally complacent, I am, I suppose, Emperor of France."

Carache had already risen to his feet. He stood gazing gravely at Napoleon; for a long time without uttering a word.

"Sire," he began at last, so impressively that the Prince felt nervous, "I congratulate you. Very heartily do I congratulate you. But don't be too sure of the provinces. They are n't to be relied on, by any manner of means."

"I am not so foolish as to imagine that the business is ended yet," the other replied. "Still we have got a good way."

"Oh, yes, we have got a good way. Paris is ours; and she is a host in herself. Nor do I anticipate that the army will refuse to follow the example set by the garrison here. But, nevertheless, we must walk warily."

"I know it quite well."

"And none of us—you and I are especially concerned in this—must think of going to bed for more than a week to come." Accordingly, Carache settled himself down to a comfortable chat which should last over the seven days.

"The great thing in these matters," he resumed, placidly, "is to be on the spot—at the helm, so to speak. This room"—glancing critically round it—"will make a capital place to work in. The whole suite is marvellously adapted to the requirements of two people who have to labour side by side. True, I don't like to administer

the Empire in its birth-throes from a barracks; and we must get to the Élysée with the least possible delay. On the other hand, you are well advised in giving 'Old Boots' time to remove his effects: any consideration shown to him or Madame will repay you fourfold. But," said he, breaking abruptly away from the main topic, "you have n't told me any of your adventures yet. Give me the pleasure of hearing them; they are certain to be worth hearing. Let me see, what happened to you directly after you and your aide-de-camp stole—I mean, left these rooms? We may as well begin at the beginning."

Napoleon's drowsiness was increasing every minute.

"I am too tired," he said bluntly.

"Tut, tut, your Majesty must not talk like that. Take something to overcome your languor: coffee is an excellent remedy. Possibly the colonel in charge will make you a cup, if you ask him to. I suppose you did n't come across Pontécoulant?"

"Yes, I did. He gave me into custody."

"Noble fellow!" ejaculated Carache.

"It nearly ruined the business," Bonaparte responded in an aggrieved tone.

"Noble fellow!"

"I do n't like him at all."

"You will, when you know him better."

"I doubt it."

"I shall now send telegrams to Clisserole and Changarnier and little Brigadier Mesnil. They are powerful people; whither they lead, the army is sure to follow," and Carache rang the bell. No one answered. He crossed over to the window, which was still wide open, and called down to the sentry: "Hi, you there! I want to send some telegrams. Hi, are you deaf? I am Carache, Prime Minister and President of the Council."

"Very well, Carache," the private returned gruffly, lifting his carbine, "if you do n't withdraw your ugly head before I count five, I will put a bullet through it. One—"

The Premier recovered his head without waiting for "two." "Martial law!" he gasped out; "Brisson and

that myrmidon below shall smart for this. Private," he shrieked, keeping, however, a careful six yards off the window, "furnish me with your name and number. I shall be compelled to punish you for your insolence."

A second and even a third such allocution, eliciting no reply beyond the man's heavy boots, Carache docketted the incident for future reference, and put it on one side. It never took him long to recover his equanimity.

"What attitude am I to adopt towards the ambassadors?" he went prattling on.

"We had better wait and hear what Brisson has to say. I am so sleepy."

"What an absurdity, with all respect to you, sire. Brisson's work is done. He shall receive promotion, and be put on half-pay. I have said it, and I do not mean to go back upon my word. He has performed his part very well, but we are now getting into deeper waters. The soldier must give way to the statesman."

"I am so tired."

"Courage, my king. Prehlen will need very special treatment; those Russians are so sly. You know the gentleman?"

"Not personally," and Napoleon's head nodded forward on his breast.

"Beware of him; he will twist you round his little finger."

"I do not doubt it,"—in sleep there is the truth.

"Who is that?"

It was Brisson, come to deliver the Emperor. The gallant warrior looked almost as weary as his master. His face, habitually drawn and furrowed, was longer than ever. His erect figure bent the least degree forward. Beyond doubt, the tension, having been relaxed, had left his fibres very loose.

Of Napoleon and Carache, the latter was the first to catch sight of the new-comer.

"My dear Colonel," he cried enthusiastically, bounding to his feet, "permit me to congratulate you. You are a hero, my beloved friend."

Brisson stopped short in amazement.

"I fear I have not the pleasure of your acquaint-



ance," he returned coldly. "I was under the impression that the Emp— and he is here," and Brisson looked inquiringly from the Premier to Napoleon.

"Ah, Brisson," the latter exclaimed, "so you are back. Well, you have done admirably." He stirred himself while he was speaking, shook off a portion of his fatigue, and noticed that the Colonel was still staring helplessly at Carache.

"Surely you recognize Monsieur Carache?"

"You ungrateful fellow," interrupted that last-named individual. "When, several days ago, I got wind of your little plans, I was at pains to procure your photograph. At least, you might have returned the compliment. Yes, I am Monsieur Carache, Prime Minister and President of the Council."

"Indeed."

"Yes; and I congratulate you upon your success. You have managed very cleverly,—very cleverly. Not that you could have effected anything without me. I was only just telling his Majesty, had I chosen I could have clapped the lot of you into gaol more than a week ago. Besides, I discovered the Emperor's identity before any one."

Brisson turned to Napoleon.

"Things are going satisfactorily. A message has just come in from Nancy to say that the garrison there has declared for you. I am expecting to hear every minute from Lille and Bordeaux."

"They won't give any trouble," said Carache. "Rouen and Havre, and Normandy generally, are what we have to fear. But you have taken precautions, no doubt. I feel inclined to send Clisserole into Normandy. I wonder whether he is back in Paris yet."

Brisson took no notice. He went on with his remarks to the Emperor.

"You look tired, sire. You may safely turn in for a few hours' rest. Bonvalet will continue under arms through the remainder of the night. The city is quiet."

Napoleon was touched by the other's solicitude. "And you, Colonel? You also look tired; you must take rest too. I heard you had been wounded?"

"Merely a scratch. I am already due at the Gare St. Lazare. We are nervous about Rouen. I have got Marchmont in charge of the station, and I don't altogether trust him."

"Quite right," burst out the irrepressible Carache. "'If you want a thing well done,'—you know the saying. We none of us must sleep. Brisson must get back to the streets, and I to the helm. Sire, I cannot permit you to go to bed. To the bridge with you! that is your proper place."

This time the Colonel treated the Prime Minister to a fixed and withering stare. Carache was not in the least degree disconcerted.

"I emphatically oppose any such withdrawal. Take it that, an hour hence, I, your principal adviser, deemed your presence necessary at Rouen,—consider what a waste of precious time would ensue if you were asleep when my summons came. Ah, Colonel Brisson, you still here? I think you can safely leave me to deal with this matter. We need hardly detain you any longer. You may return to your post. And take my cordial approval with you. So far the thing has been managed excellently. 'So far,'—what am I saying? Rather, *all* your part has been managed magnificently. But deeper waters, Colonel, deeper waters!—you understand me."

The other was not ready of speech, but he looked vocabularies.

"Colonel Bonvalet—" he began. Carache promptly stopped him.

"Never you mind Colonel Bonvalet, or any one else. My dear fellow, you do n't need me to tell you that you ought to be looking after Marchmont, over at the Gare de l'Ouest. Off with you!" he added with playful peremptoriness, "off with you!"

Brisson's mouth opened wider and wider.

"Stay, there was one thing I had to mention to you," Carache added, still quite friendly, but the least bit less playful than before, "that sentinel whom you have seen fit to station at the front door is an ill-bred, impertinent fellow. He actually offered to shoot me just now."

His words came to Brisson as an inspiration. He

thrust his head forth into the night, and called down to the sentry to come upstairs. The Premier meanwhile assumed his most judicial attitude, at the same time nodding across to Napoleon, who was busy nodding to himself. Colonel Brisson—mindful, no doubt, of the other's tongue—burst out with his orders directly the soldier entered the room.

"Conduct this gentlemen to the guardroom," he said, pointing to Carache.

"Not at all," said the latter, in no wise comprehending the order. "I am content to lodge my complaint with you. I have no desire to have the poor fellow severely punished. All I want is to make him understand that we are in Paris, *not* in Nicaragua, and that he cannot put bullets through the head of any one he chooses. Do you hear, sir?"

The soldier looked towards Brisson, who renewed his previous order.

"Conduct this gentleman to the guardroom."

"I keep telling you I don't want to go. Brisson, you *are* pig-headed; there's no denying that, though it may be a rude thing to say. All right, sentinel; you may return to your post. Do n't offend again. You can consider your present little slip as condoned. It is his Majesty's wish that you should be pardoned."

"Conduct this gentleman to the guardroom," Brisson repeated in a sort of monotonous chant.

Carache commenced to look a trifle nervous: "What do you mean?"

"Conduct him to Colonel Bonvalet."

"But I do n't want Colonel Bonvalet."

"Monsieur, I regret the Colonel wants you. He has long been looking for you. Arrangements have been made to lodge your Excellency in another part of the barracks."

"I protest—"

"It is useless."

"I appeal to the Emperor."

"My dear Carache, I have no voice in the matter."

The Premier seemed to regard this last remark as final. Like the wise man he was, he bowed to *force*

*majeure* and followed the sentry. Not but that he left his protest behind him. "You had better take care," said he to Brisson calmly enough, when he was by the door, "or you won't get your promotion. It will all depend on their behaviour in the guardroom."

Brisson waited until the retreating footsteps had died away; then turned to Napoleon. "Your Majesty should follow my advice and go to bed. You are dead tired, I can see; you can hardly keep your eyes open. No wonder—you have had a fatiguing day."

"And a very glorious one, thanks to you."

"I knew we should win," Napoleon's companion responded deprecatingly, "if only we worked together."

"We could never have won without you. It was a lucky chance which brought me to your mother's house that day. Hadamard and De Morin will look blue when they come to know of this."

"They know already."

"Then they are gnashing their teeth. Well, I shall be ready to deal with them. I am certain of that. With Hadamard especially. I have not forgotten the little viper's insolence."

"He certainly needs a lesson."

"He shall get one. But do not, my dear Colonel, go away with the impression that I shall only have room enough in my memory for those who have wronged me. There are others besides Hadamard and De Morin with whom I shall know how to deal."

"Ah?"

"With you, for instance, and all those who have contributed in the least degree to my success."

"Your Majesty is very kind."

"Not at all. I am merely grateful."

"You won't be grateful if I keep you up much longer. You can go to bed with a light heart, whatever that meddling busybody may say. Good-night, your Majesty."

Napoleon roused himself into a momentary condition of absolute wakefulness. The chance had come for one of those "curtains," to which he was always very partial,

and which he had often promised himself during the last few days.

“Good-night, *Marshal* Brisson. No, not a word! Good-night again, *Marshal* Brisson.”

And then an unfathomable silence came over everything. And our hero flung himself upon his couch, and passed at once into a profound slumber which remembered nothing, not even that the mysterious God had given him the opportunity he had sought so long in bitterness and tears.





Book II  
À BERLIN



## Chapter I

Breakfast at the Élysée had just finished: Napoleon passed through into the library and flung himself with a show of weariness upon a sofa which lay between his desk and the door.

His Majesty was not in the best of tempers. Though no later than the third week of his reign, already those petty disagreeables of life, from which even emperors are not exempt, were beginning to make themselves felt. Godefroy (our old friend the theatrical printer, whose whim it had been to select the post of valet) would persist in drawing the blinds at an hour when no self-respecting monarch ought to be in bed. The first day of a new sovereign, even the third or fourth, might supply their own excuses; but this was the twenty-second, and in France too, where, so far as sovereigns are concerned, a little goes a long way. Napoleon glanced wearily at the clock. And from this piece of furniture his eyes moved slowly round the room. What he saw lent no colour to his discontent. The apartment, half study and all library, was lined on three sides with books which reached the ceiling. The fourth exhausted itself in a number of narrow windows, leading to a balcony overlooking an inner courtyard of the palace. Within, the rich furniture glittered and creaked with youth; and not a single item but surpassed in splendour the beauties of the Rue de Berlin. The latter habitation was once more dissolved into shadows, the shell decomposed into Verre and some new tenant not yet found, the goods settled down (at a reduction) into a sort of sedimentary Hadamard, who, moreover, had secured the contract for furnishing the Élysée. Napoleon found no regret in his heart for those scattered movables: he easily tired, lov-

ing nothing more than to fit himself, his brain, character, wardrobe, and surroundings out anew from top to toe.

The old gang, however, had refused to humour this love for change. At the first opportunity they had rallied round the Empire with a devotion which wrung tears from Monsieur Carache's eyes. Released at dawn on the first day of the reign, that worthy had repaired straightway to the Imperial presence. The presence was breakfasting. The Premier took a vacant chair and plunged into business. His promptitude merited the success which it obtained. "Your Majesty," said he, "I have thought the matter well over. I mean to do a little reconstructing." The Imperial mouth, which was full of bread and butter, ejaculated "Ah"; and there the matter ended. Carache did his reconstructing, which was apparent rather than real. The clock struck eleven, and put Napoleon in mind of a third misery—the greatest of all. It was nearly certain (Carache had told him so two days back) that a conspiracy had thus early sprung into existence with the object of casting him from his throne. Its leading spirit was a certain Eurasian, Nadez, a filthy negro who had been expelled from every country in the world, from France included, being allowed back into the latter state under a special clause of the general amnesty granted at the commencement of the reign. Carache stated further, that if some prominent personages were not already implicated, they soon would be. That was the extent of his information. As to the means likely to be employed—well, the Premier favoured explosive bullets. Our hero shuddered as he thought of the nasty wounds these utensils made. Then he sprung from his resting-place with a cry of wild defiance, and started to pace the floor.

Let them kill him with explosive bullets, or dynamite, or any other devilish weapon they chose! He was not afraid. The other people were n't; why should he be? And this Nadez should discover whether he was to be shot at with impunity. He would enlighten this Eurasian scum pretty quickly upon that point. Napoleon rushed to his desk. Still standing, he scribbled off the four words, "Let Nadez be arrested," on a sheet of paper,—that and



a bold and flowing N, nothing else,—and thrust this message into an envelope (one from a large bundle) which bore M. Carache's printed name and address. He despatched it forthwith, hardly delaying to make it secure.

"So much for the explosive bullets," he exclaimed, when he was once more alone. "The rest shall find in the same way that I am not to be played with. I won't stand their dictation much longer."

He would deal with Carache as he had with the assassin; Verre, too, who had been included in the reconstructed Cabinet,—an appointment which Madame Verre had ascribed to Imperial favour. Pontécoulant, whose resurrection went without saying, he regarded with somewhat different eyes. Even already he had conceived a sneaking affection for him: doubtless he looked forward to the next occasion on which it would be necessary to throw up barricades. Hadamard—resuming the list of the proscribed—he had hated from the first. His own importations were not more satisfactory. The Count de Morin, who, it need hardly be said, had not found it necessary to accept his post at the hands of the universal dispenser, had made number two of Napoleon's visitors that morning in barracks after the *coup d'état*; and there, in the midst of much gay raillery concerning unfledged Machiavellis, had cursorily informed his kinsman that he was too old to take upon himself any post more onerous than that of Grand Chamberlain. So Grand Chamberlain he was, with apartments in every royal palace; his cat-like dictation and causticities daily galling Napoleon more and more. Even blunt old Godefroy jarred. He wanted to surround himself with devoted adherents, men who should only have known him from the commencement of his prosperity. But he must have a little time wherein to look about him. First, he must gather the threads. *Then* he would pull them. The world should see that he meant to govern as well as rule.

His thoughts took a higher flight. He meant to be great; but he meant to be noble and high-souled, likewise. His reign should make for goodness. Like Arthur the King, whom he loved, he would right the wronged throughout the realm, and ensure peace in the land.

And inasmuch as nothing makes us so happy as the thought of the good we mean to do, he started a blithe air, going over, meanwhile, the memory of the few pleasant things which had befallen him since his accession. How he had been present at Lady Threpps's ball after all, without, however, managing to pay off old scores. His kind hostess had completely forgotten Walter Sadler. Both Mendril and Fersen treated him with a genial friendliness that was eloquent of a pre-existing acquaintance. Madame Verre likewise took the opportunity the function offered to show that she had a soul above resentment. Prince Felix was another little source of pleasure to our hero, who smiled even to recall the look on his cousin's face at their first meeting after *coup d'état*. The poor creature was still recouping at the hired villa of a friend down at Auteuil. A beautiful Swedish actress, who possessed a house of her own, may be trusted to calm any one's nerves. The next minute Godefroy flung wide the door.

"The Prime Minister and Marshal Brisson!" They had brought the redoubtable little General Mesnil with them, the French Moltke, and the commandant of Lille. Carache led the way. He waved a sheet of note-paper above his head—"Let Nadez be arrested. N."—Napoleon's own message. "Really, sire," he expostulated, though in perfect good humour, "you must not send me these silly things. Please leave me to deal with Nadez my own way. Your Majesty must, so to say, mark time for a year, and observe how we manage. We are all devoted to you, heart and soul. You need have no fear."

"But I thought—" stammered *Flos Regum Arthurus*.

"Thinking comes later on," rejoined the Premier. And he wagged his finger. Mesnil and Brisson meanwhile had got well into the room. The commandant was short and thin, with wrinkled, clean-shaven face and wispy hair and ferret-like eyes. To some extent nature had cast him in the mould of another great warrior, now defunct; only the little Frenchman could scarcely be termed "silent," even by his most admiring friends.

Brisson led him forward.

"This, your Majesty," he commenced, gloomily enough, "is General Mesnil."

"Ah," Napoleon exclaimed, not budging from his place in the centre of the room, and bent on not committing himself. "I was under the impression, General Mesnil, that you were stationed at Lille."

The little fellow glanced with a puzzled air from Brisson to Carache, and from Carache to Brisson. Then he turned his twinkling eyes upon his master and smiled.

"I sometimes come to town. Even your Majesty would find perpetual life in Lille dull."

"No doubt, no doubt. It is warm?" and his Majesty thawed the least little bit.

"Very warm."

"How long do you stay here?"

"That depends on our two friends," replied Mesnil, once more turning to survey the others. Carache sat with his head well back and his eyes shut, peace over every part of him. Brisson, on the other hand, made no attempt to conceal how he smarted under the hasp of these inanities.

Napoleon, too, glanced at his War Minister. "He keeps us all in order," he observed, smiling faintly. The next minute he remembered his position and became iron.

"How does your Majesty like the Elysée?" Mesnil began, on his side.

"Very much—fairly well, thanks. I find it draughty."

"One would have gathered as much. What sort of bedroom have they given you?"

"A good enough bedroom," distantly. His Majesty was not quite sure that he ought to discuss these things.

"Hein," he cried, including the three of them in an acute survey; "we are pretty strong at Lille, hein?"

Brisson brightened. Carache nodded, without, however, opening his eyes; and Mesnil continued an inspection of the furniture on which he had just embarked.

"Very strong," the last-named individual replied.

"That 's right, that 's right," and Napoleon subjected the three of them to another of his searching glances.

"It could stand a siege, I suppose, or a bombardment, or anything of the kind."

"Yes," Mesnil answered, with undisguised disdain, "provided any one were fool enough to want to bombard it."

"Precisely. I meant that. And you, my dear Brisson, how go things with you? Everything satisfactory, hein?"

Brisson made a moody inclination of his head.

"You see, my dear General," Napoleon rattled on, "we still have something to do in Paris. Neither Brisson nor I ever seem to get a minute free. Really, I sometimes regret the old days in London. Carache is the only one of us three who does not work any harder. Responsibility is not all delight and glory, that you may guess. You lucky people at Lille."

"Yes, we have no responsibilities at Lille," Mesnil acquiesced sweetly. "At least I have n't. I don't know about my subordinates—they may have a little."

"I didn't mean that. I meant—I meant—your responsibility cannot compare with ours."

"General Mesnil's responsibilities," Brisson burst in, "are very great. They soon will be much greater."

"I do not follow you," the Emperor replied with overwhelming haughtiness.

"It's merely Brisson's way. He merely wants to point out that I have enough to do at Lille."

"I desire to suggest more than that. The Emperor has my meaning."

"Really you ought not to address me in that fashion; ought he, Carache?"

Carache, his eyes still closed, nodded his head obliquely from left to right.

"It is not more than the truth," pursued the Marshal, commencing to fumble with the handle of his sword.

"I gave your Majesty notice of General Mesnil's visit."

"I do not recollect."

"You can hardly forget."

"Tut, tut, it really cannot signify. His Majesty knows that I am one of his most faithful servants."

"I am certainly very glad to make your acquaint-

ance"; here the Emperor glanced resentfully at Brisson. "I do not know why I should have waited till the Marshal saw fit to bring you."

"So I told them," Mesnil exclaimed gleefully. "I came to Paris twelve hours before you were proclaimed Emperor, but Carache"—who was in a deep slumber—"would not let me see you."

Napoleon made haste to get to new ground. "When do you go back to Lille?"

"He is not going back."

"Indeed."

"Yes, the Premier intends to speak to you on the subject. He has made his selection. Carache, Carache,"—but that wise and eminent fellow would not be roused. His device succeeded admirably. The Emperor looked at him helplessly for a few minutes, and then gave way, falling instead into the traditional brusquerie of his family, and turning upon Mesnil with an impatience that was meant to be half jocular.

"So you are their candidate? Well, am I to say yes, or no, hey?"

The General grinned. "I must not venture to advise your Majesty."

"Do you think you are equal to the post?"

"Time will prove me."

"It may be at too large a cost."

"Your Majesty confirms the selection of the Cabinet?"  
Brisson interrupted.

"Provisionally," Napoleon replied with extreme caution. The next minute he must have forgotten his qualified consent; for he went on, looking through the General's eyes into the General's soul, "*I think* I have made a wise choice. I have heard much about you; and I *think* I have made a wise choice."

"You flatter me."

"Not at all. Your name *is* very well known. Yes," with growing conviction, "I am sure that I have selected the best man for the post. If trouble should come, you, without doubt, are the fittest man to deal with it."

"Trouble *will* come."

"I did not say that."



"But you must know that it will."

"Marshal Brisson, I know nothing of the sort. I have not made up my mind."

The Marshal assumed the look of irritated dismay with which by now Napoleon was well familiar.

"I do not know how your Majesty can say that?"

"I am sorry."

"I do not indeed. The matter was settled before you ascended the throne."

"I take a different view. I said or did nothing at that time to justify this assertion of yours."

"But your pledges—"

"I gave no pledges. I won't have you say that I gave pledges. I did no such thing. It's a—not true."

The voices of both men were raised. Brisson evidently had no intention of budging from his position.

"I repeat, your Majesty gave specific pledges before ascending the throne."

"You ought not to say such a thing."

"But I do say it."

"Then you must say it out of my presence. I shall look for another Minister of War. Carache, Carache, do you hear me?"

"Tut, tut," put in Mesnil, "our good Brisson is only a little excited. He does n't mean half he says. If you maintain that you gave no pledges, of course we believe you. You believe him, do n't you, Brisson?"

"Very well, he gave no pledges," Brisson rejoined with an alacrity which was a new phase in his character. "But he must see the need of giving them."

"Why?"

"How can you ask me such a fo—such a question? The choice between peace and war is not in your hands. You can merely choose between the defensive and the offensive."

"I do not altogether agree with you."

"Then declare at once that you mean to try and keep peace."

"I shall declare nothing of the sort."

"But—"

"Marshal Brisson, you had much better leave the



matter where it stands. I am not going to make a momentous decision like this at a day's notice. And you know well enough that I am not the man to yield to dictation. I must have time, gentlemen,—time."

"How long do you want?"

"That is not a question for you to ask. I shall take as long as I think fit, without binding myself to any settled period. And when I have made up my mind, I shall give you instant word. At present," he went on, "I lean towards peace. But do not be afraid, I shall not suffer any personal bias to influence me. Something may easily occur within the next few weeks to change my mind. I, however, warn you, Brisson, if I do finally choose peace, you will have to give my choice a loyal acceptance. Once my mind is made up, I am always adamant."

Brisson's face had been growing gradually redder under this harangue. His sole answer was to unhook the buckle of his sword-belt, and let the weapon, with all its belongings, fall clattering to the floor. Then he turned upon his heels, and walked straight out of the room.

Monsieur Carache opened his eyes wearily. "I think," said he, stretching himself preparatory to rising—"I think we need hardly trouble your Majesty further. Come along, Mesnil." And when he was by the door he looked down impassively at his colleague's leavings, murmuring under his breath:

"I think I will offer the post to Clisserole. He is not as tractable in many things as this one, but he will take teaching. Mesnil, after you. Adieu, your Majesty." Later on Godefroy came in and removed the sword.

## Chapter II

Two miles west of Meaux, and on the Paris road, there stands, or rather there stood at the time of this story,—for every token of the Emperor capable of destruction has since been destroyed,—a small, square house, remarkable for nothing, except perchance the dazzling whiteness of its walls, and the still more dazzling green of its door and shutters. In front it abutted directly upon the main road; but behind, were you so fortunate as to be allowed to enter, you might see that it commanded acres upon acres of park-like lawn and beauteous flower-beds that ran down to the river Marne, and marched for miles with its sweet-flowing stream.

Villa Yvonne, for such was the name, had been bought only the previous autumn to serve as one among numberless presidential summer-houses; and Napoleon, passing it on his way by road from Lagny to Meaux, six days after his accession, cast longing eyes upon it, so charming was it, with its air of trim, well-kept repose and its glimpses of paradise beyond.

The Emperor was on his way to a public function, the invitation to which had reached him the day after the *coup d'état*. Such alacrity on the part of the city fathers in recognizing the new order had gratified him exceedingly, while the recollection that the Earl of Framlingham owned a villa in the neighbourhood had been an additional inducement.

A band of school-girls dressed in white, bearing flowers, and a shrill song which they sang—so it seemed to Napoleon—over and over again, delayed his carriage nearly five minutes outside this nestling pleasure-house. The noise and glitter worried him. Even thus early he had come to connect these melodious young virgins with

infernal-machines. And he turned to such parts of the Villa Yvonne as were visible, for some relief.

"Perhaps she lives here," he reflected with a half indifference. "Perhaps that balcony yonder leads into her room. She may be in it now. I wonder whether it is so or not? I wonder whether I shall ever see her again, now that I am more than her equal?" He turned to the Prefect of the department, who sat beside him.

"Can you tell me to whom that villa belongs?"

The Prefect could not. He rather fancied it belonged to the state.

"It does not belong to the Earl of Framlingham by any chance?"

That, too, the Prefect could not answer for certain. He rather fancied it did not.

"He lives near here, does he not?"

To this question the Prefect was happy to be able to give a definite reply. The Earl *had* a summer-house in the department. He rather fancied that it was near Meaux.

All that sultry July afternoon, in the midst of tire-some town folk and speechifying mayors and prefects (he was opening a new wing of the Public Library), his mind would keep wandering away from the business in hand to revisit the small, unpretentious white dwelling which lay so peacefully among soft rolling hills beside the shining river. He envied its possessor from the bottom of his heart; for, as yet, he did not know the extent of his belongings. Had he indeed, his envy might have been less ardent. And he half made up his mind to bid for it before quitting the town. But tea with the municipality, and a triumphal progress to the Paris railway station, put the whole matter, the Framlinghams included, out of his head. Amidst the shouts and plaudits of the mob he forgot the Villa Yvonne; nay, even all memory of Muriel Mendril lay slowly dying in his distracted brain for want of sufficient nutriment; and but for a chance word, a few days later, he might perhaps never have thought of it or her again.

The Grand Chamberlain was reciting the list of royal residences. He gabbled them out monotonously, and the

Emperor lay back in his chair listening, his eyes closed, and to all appearances asleep.

"Chateau of Fontainebleau," jabbered De Morin. "Villa Napoleon, near Fécamp. A house, building, and unnamed as yet, at Nay, in the department of the Basses Pyrenées. Villa Henri Quatre, Cannes. Villa Alaise, Jura. Villa Yvonne, outside Meaux. Vil—"

Napoleon started up, now wide awake.

"What! do you mean to say that the Villa Yvonne is mine?"

"Certainly," the other answered, opening his eyes.

"But I thought it might possibly belong to,—" and his Majesty came to an abrupt ending.

"To?" cooed De Morin.

"Nothing, it does not matter. I happened to notice the house when I was down at Meaux the other afternoon; that is all. The place struck me as being an exceedingly beautiful one; I am glad to find that it belongs to me."

"To you and your successors," the old gentleman corrected him softly.

"Yes, yes, I mean that. I shall certainly stay there," and the memory of Muriel Mendril came back to him, not with the full force of reawakened passion, but softly, like some temptation which one meets and welcomes, and which first needs kindling before it gathers its irresistible way. The chance of seeing her again, he felt languidly, was worth the journey.

Napoleon added nothing more at the moment, and the next few days were entirely taken up by the events narrated in the preceding chapter.

But the morning which followed his stand against the dogs of war found him in just such a mood as needed the calm of the placid country. Even King Arthur must have had his moments of weakness and reaction; *our* hero, for his part, yearned to escape the turmoil of the Élysée, and substitute tranquil meditation among green fields.

So he sent Brisson his sword, accompanied by a genial little note to the effect that he was not going to let a faithful servant go so lightly. He understood and for-

gave his outburst. He really had not made up his mind one way or the other, and only wanted time in which to be allowed to come to a satisfactory decision. He sent a second note to Carache, saying that he was going down to Meaux, to remain there at any rate till the following Monday, and that in the mean time the Premier need not bother about a new Minister of War. It was King Arthur with the chill very much off—or rather on; and the best of us grow cold at times.

He quitted town much past midday, Godefroy his sole attendant. It was his first experience of a voyage incognito, that exclusive appanage of kings. Ah, now he felt an Emperor indeed! They can never have been royal, even in their dreams, who say that the purple mantle makes the monarch. It is in the clothes of vulgar men that he is really regal—the homely grey frock-coat with facings of slate-coloured silk, the once well-known white pot-hat—these are the fittest setting, and the best calculated to show himself and the world how he outstrips the common run. But to resume. The two men smuggled into Meaux, and out of it again—the latter journey in a hired landau, the Villa Yvonne not yet being fully equipped—without recognition, reaching their journey's end with the evening sun upon it, the first shades of diamond-decked darkness stealing through the trees.

His first impressions had not deceived him. Napoleon could tell as much directly the villa came in sight. The bright white and green of the house itself, the many glimpses of flower-set lawns, through foliage that was a delicate frame rather than a curtain, and the consciousness of the unseen river, were charms which had no fading.

How happy these things made him. The rooms were so bright and elegant, and yet so simple. What a relief to get away from even such modified magnificence as the Élysée afforded. It was Harrow over again. Harrow, rid of the Damoclean sword, the prospect of struggling days. He ate a heartier dinner than he had done for years, then went out to enjoy the twilight, and explore the length and breadth of his domain. It was not yet



seven. He made for the silver thread of water that lay far down yonder among the poplars, gradually disappearing in the twilight. Around him on every side was the stillness of evening, broken with ever-increasing rarity by the passing cry of birds, and merely intensified by the ceaseless hum of invisible insects.

His chosen path, once he reached the river, ran through an avenue of interminable poplars, with the narrowest strip of velvet sward between him and the gently rippling stream. Upon the other side he could descry the dim outline of woods, which ran in ridges over undulating country, and, beyond, the rich fields and orchards—now beginning to darken—of this pleasant "Pays Mellois."

Amid such beautiful surroundings and in so peaceful an atmosphere he forgot the purpose with which he had started on his walk. Brisson and Mesnil, Felix with his precious Italian produce, German intrigues, the Revenge, faded away into the lengthening shadows. A trifle sufficed to recall them. A hare started across his path, and his temperament, prone to superstition, set him at once imagining possible misfortunes.

His throne flung upon the hazard of war,—this at once introduced itself as the most terrifying, and jostled aside the presentment of any minor ills. And thus he came straightway back to the consideration of the vital question which had brought him down to Meaux. The all-pervading calm attuned his mind to anything but war. It was not that he dreaded to convert the smiling scene, and many another like it, into a vast weal of desolation. It was not that he feared to turn the song and laughter of passably contented folk into wailing and lamentation. It was nothing more than this: that he trembled to risk a country that showed so rich and gracious, even though there might be a chance of adding to its boundaries and the glory of his name.

It was the soul of Laetizia Ramolino moving within him, the parsimonious ancestress. What he had already was good; why strive for more, and jeopardize all?

"No, no," he murmured, "my family no longer signifies a war of revenge. It means this: men are grown



tired of corrupt bourgeois rulers and the unstable government resulting from a too-rapid succession of ship-broking presidents and grocer-premiers. They want a figure-head who has some distinction of his own besides the distinction which they can give him. They see in me an equal with William of Germany, not necessarily a rival."

The remark, especially the latter part, pleased him very much. He went over it several times afresh, smiling all the while. "William of Germany," as he was pleased to style his long-lost cousin and brother, had worried him much in days gone by. It was a pleasure at last to be able to number himself among the few equals of this remarkable potentate. "No, no," he repeated with redoubled emphasis, "it shall be peace"; and then out loud, in all the energy of conviction:

"France is big enough for me."

"You would indeed be hard to please if it were not so," came a girlish voice from among the trees,—a voice that spoke under the constraint of suppressed laughter.

Napoleon started as though he had been shot; then moved gingerly in the direction of the sound.

"Who is there?"

No answer came, save the rustling of hastily parted leaves and the soft tread of light feet stealing away.

"Who is there?" he cried again, this time with exceeding boldness, though not so boldly as to conceal all traces of a tremor in his tones. He felt it more than likely that the beautiful voice might turn out to be a decoy. He ducked his head to escape an explosive bullet, and in so doing caught a sight, in dim outlines, of the intruder, through a tunnel made by low-hanging boughs. A young girl—from her figure she could not have been over twenty—was creeping hurriedly on tip-toe towards a small stone bridge which formed the river gateway to the villa grounds. Her lithe and graceful figure satisfied him that her face must be beautiful, in keeping. He felt more certain than ever that she came from the Eurasian, Nadez, and that he, Napoleon, was meant to follow and to be destroyed. Nevertheless he dived through the thicket. He strode after her, loudly calling upon her to

stop. Directly the girl saw that escape was impossible, she turned and faced her pursuer with a show of utter indifference. At the same moment the feeble gas-jet which professed to light the bridge flared into a momentary brightness and disclosed her face.

"Mademoiselle!" he muttered with all the reverence of a love that likewise had just flared up out of a feeble flame.

"I am sure I beg Monsieur's pardon," she exclaimed, breaking abruptly away from her air of careless disdain into a bright smile; "I am very sorry. But, honestly, I could not help it. Monsieur looked so very comic, it was with the greatest difficulty that I could keep myself from laughing outright,"—a difficulty the recurrence of which she seemingly experienced at that moment.

"I am glad I afforded Mademoiselle some amusement."

"Indeed, you did. I regret to confess that I have been watching you for many minutes. At first I thought you were a mad—that you were lying in wait to kill the Emperor; but your concluding remarks showed me that your intentions were peaceful. I am so sorry. Once more, Monsieur must believe that I apologize most sincerely; and at the same time permit me to wish him good-night," and with a casual nod she turned and strode away across the sward, disappearing presently over the bridge, into the blackness of the other bank.

Napoleon stood for a while motionless in a transport of ecstasy. This meeting was worth kingdoms; and he felt convinced that there lurked some hidden providence behind it, for good or for evil,—it had followed so close upon his recent stroke of fortune. Here was the very sweetness of triumph indeed; and of a triumph that contained something still sweeter, albeit fraught with a thousand dangers.

Every word Muriel had uttered, every ripple of her happy laughter, rang through his ears, haunting him long after he had returned to the Villa Yvonne. The pale, somewhat pinched face, illumined by the wonderful eyes, and crowned with the wealth of hair that shone like burnished copper, was once again as vividly before him

as it had been a few weeks back. Her image flitted across his dreams and told him—of what his waking thoughts were but faintly cognizant—that it had found its way for good and all into his heart.

The next day brought a return of the brilliant sunshine, but also, unhappily, numerous important letters, among which, one showing that the good people of Meaux had not taken long to spy out the angel in their midst. They craved leave to present an address. Napoleon sighed as he bent over his desk, and accepted gladly, fixing to-morrow, and sighing yet more heavily as he reflected that it was a Saturday. He went with the same grudging spirit through the remainder of his correspondence, and it was close upon three before he could give his mind free range over last night's delicious meeting.

"Godefroy," he exclaimed with a fine assumption of indifference,—his valet had just brought in a cup of tea,—  
"Godefroy, the good people from Meaux seem to use these grounds of mine pretty freely."

"H'm," grunted Godefroy. "Sugar?"

"No sugar, thank you. I found one of them strolling by the river yesterday evening."

"They do no harm," grumbled the servant.

"They do no harm; but—"

"I note your Majesty's complaint. The keepers shall have word to stop it."

"Oh, no, I scarcely mean that. As you say, they do no harm; and one does not wish to become unpopular. No, no, Godefroy; you need n't go to those lengths."

These last words must have come forth with suspicious eagerness. At any rate, Godefroy darted a quick glance at Napoleon's face; then turned away without ceremony and busied himself with the tea things.

For a few minutes neither spoke.

"Then it was a lady whom your Majesty found strolling beside the river yesterday evening?" Godefroy said at last, in a tone quite unlike any he had used hitherto.

The young man smiled. "Yes, Godefroy, it was a lady."

"Take care! take care!" the other rejoined with growing earnestness. "You will ruin yourself, us your

adherents, and possibly France." He had already turned full upon the Emperor, and was now stretching out both hands (his fingers were like gherkins) towards the latter in earnest supplication.

Napoleon smiled a second smile of even greater satisfaction.

"Never fear, honest Godefroy," he returned with a reassuring nod; "I will be circumspect. I promise you that much. You don't, you cannot, suppose that I intend to drop this fine empire over a petticoat?"

"Many a better man has dropped a finer empire from the same cause," honest Godefroy rejoined. "I know something about the women, and I can tell you they are, one and all, dangerous. Take my advice, your Majesty, and get married as quickly as you can. For heaven's sake don't delay it under the impression that you can enjoy yourself a bit beforehand. Ugh!" the old fellow went on with a genuine shudder, "I never can forget how that poor Archduke met his death—shot lying on his bed! shot like a cowardly dog! assassinated under the cover of a pretended duel! Don't you ever get yourself into the same predicament. I don't think you would put up with it quite as brav—quietly as a Hapsburg; you are not the same sort of man at all."

"Come, come," Napoleon cried, hardly knowing whether to be amused or angry, "are you not jumping rather to conclusions? I nourish no evil designs against—against—against any living soul." Then with a sudden access of pompous dignity, "it is n't my way, I can assure you. Besides, this—this young stranger is a lady."

"All the worse. So was she. That's why he died like a dog."

"Thank you," very haughtily, "I have heard enough of the late Archduke. Tell me, Godefroy,"—this more cheerfully,—"*do you happen to know anything of a certain Earl of Framlingham, an English nobleman who has a villa near here?*"

"You mean the late ambassador?"

"That is he."

"Nothing at all," the valet said slowly, making a

mental note to the effect that he would find out a good deal.

"I think it is the same man," Napoleon pursued; "though I am not quite certain. His wife is French, I understand, and owns property in this neighbourhood. I wish you would discover where; and all about it and them. He has a son—two sons; one of them was my dearest friend over in England. Two sons, and perhaps a daughter."

"Mademoiselle was by the riverside last night?"

"Yes, she was."

"Worse and worse," groaned Godefroy.

"You need not wait," Napoleon replied coldly.

"Ah, your Majesty," his servant persevered a last time, his hand upon the door, "take care, take care!" And to point the value of this warning it may be added that the master spent his evening to no purpose by the steps of the little bridge.

The following morning he made another attempt. In the middle of breakfast the sudden thought came to him, that she might at this identical moment be down there beside the river. He started up to go and see. But Godefroy intercepted him before he had even crossed the gravel path which lay beneath his veranda. "M'sieu forgets," murmured the domestic, a faint smile playing about the corners of his mouth; "his letters require attention. Then there is the deputation at eleven." "M'sieu" felt that he had been caught in the act. He said no word, but merely obeyed with a comfortless little laugh, retracing his steps to the house. There he shut himself up in his library, opposite those hateful unopened missives, which descended upon him daily for no other purpose than to interfere with his pleasure.

To-day they were more disagreeable than ever. The Minister of War alone sent three urgent appeals. "Come back to Paris at once!" ran one of them,—a fair sample of the whole,—"things are far worse than I have stated in the two other letters which will arrive by this post. Clouds of Germans hover about the frontier. Couriers, just arrived from Provence, inform me that Piedmont is a camp. The blow may fall at any moment. In God's



name, be here to defend, since you have let slip the chance to attack."

It cannot be denied that these outbursts frightened him. For one thing, they were so very nastily worded. In time, with the advent of greater experience, he would know how to value them at their proper worth. But it was mean of the Minister thus to take advantage of his callow state, especially after his own magnanimous behaviour. He didn't mean to forgive him for it. He proceeded to deal with Brisson's missives on their merits, and by a chain of *viva voce* reasoning, which may or may not have been convincing, came to the conclusion that these were nil. So he said "Bah!" once or twice with considerable vehemence, and spent the next two hours in absolute and unconquerable idleness. With an arm supported on the elbow of his chair, and his head drooping wearily upon his arm, he suffered his gaze to travel mournfully through the open windows. "She is down there by the river," he kept murmuring. "Possibly waiting for me," his love continued, deducing—as love does—such warm and cheering conclusions from such slender premises. He made an attempt to begin a reply to Brisson; but in vain. He flung his pen from him. "She is down there by the river," was the only coherent thought he could get to; that, and occasionally, "Bah! the fellow is an incompetent. No one wants to fight us."

What had become of his energy, his powers of industry, of former years? What indeed? Alas, it was many a long day since he and they had had aught in common. Pimlico the Abomination had killed them. But surely, surely they were not quite dead. Responsibilities, not to mention decent clothes and a full stomach, would revivify them. The thing went without saying. Already his "application"—as they call it in young ladies' schools—was a shade better than it had been a few months back. Just to prove as much, he opened his remaining letters and strewed them about the table.

Comforted in this belief, he gave himself over altogether to the demon of idleness. He dipped his pen into



the ink to have it ready for Godefroy, then he strolled through the open window to the balcony which ran along the length of the gardenside. This balcony encased, besides his own, the three windows of the small reception-room which had to serve for any Imperial entertainments. Our hero gazed in mournfully at the decorated chamber. His spirits were at a low ebb indeed, when furniture had lost its power to charm. He only thought how cold and desolate it looked, lacking as it did that touch of a woman's hand which alone can render these places of ceremony habitable. The sunlight fell in rich rays across the enamelled walls, the rugs, and polished floors. To his dreaming brain it set its halo round something far more beautiful,—the ivory-tinted skin, the deep grey eyes, the shining hair, and, more than all, that indefinable smile which made his heart ache merely to think of. He was an Emperor, truly, with a good large stage, but what he wanted most was still far out of reach.

But the sound of carriage wheels, followed by the continuous shuffling of feet in the hall below, warned him of the coming deputation. He had barely time to fling himself into the midst of his papers, when Godefroy entered with word that it awaited his pleasure in the council chamber. Numerically—as he learnt to his great joy from the hats in the hall—the deputation was a small one. In weight and importance, however, it proved the largest which Meaux could produce.

Monsieur Verre accompanied it as sponsor, and, so to speak, pervaded every part of it. The Mayor was present, the fat gentleman over there in the corner, muttering the skeletons of an oration. Beside him stood the Prefect of the department, who was engaged in a critical survey of the furniture and painted ceiling. Two members of the Municipal Council, a prominent Meaux manufacturer, and the Sub-prefect completed the gathering.

They all bowed as the Emperor made his appearance. Verre raised his hand, and the Mayor and Prefect advanced, in step, and side by side, towards their master.

These two functionaries differed widely. The Prefect had an aspect of great acuteness. His habit was to cast

scrutinizing glances in all directions, and scan every face as though he were piercing into the inmost recesses of the heart. Then he would close his jaws with a snap, pursing his thin lips, as though to say, "I have taken your measure, my dear creature. Do not trouble to try and deceive me." Yet in truth he was an irreclaimable ass,—the incarnation of obtuse self-sufficiency. As for the Mayor, he looked the fool the other was. In face and figure not unlike Godefroy, he lacked the latter's bright, twinkling eyes. Indeed, the head of the town always seemed half asleep. He moved about with extreme slowness. He breathed stertorously, and he gazed out through half-closed eyelids upon a world that was habitually careless of what he said or did. Yet the pupils of the lazy eyes often hardened to observe minute points left unnoticed by men with almost as an acute gaze, and fifty times the intelligence of his official superior.

Monsieur Verre hovered behind them; he began:

"Majesty, this is an honour which Meaux has for many years merited, but never received."

They all bowed. The Prefect laced his long white hands cupwise, while the Mayor left his head bent forward upon his bosom. Possibly he had forgotten it. The Minister resumed:

"You are very welcome. Our most earnest prayer is that our beautiful district will have a beneficial effect upon your health. We all—not least myself—know the cares and trials of your arduous position. If I may be permitted to refer to it, I, too, was at the helm of state for—for—a short time. I venture to think that the country still bears some imprint of my beneficent rule." He waved a majestic forefinger in the direction of the Mayor.

The Prefect took this as a signal.

"Monsieur speaks the truth," said he. "All of us who enjoy, or who *have* enjoyed places of responsibility, know the fearful inroads they make upon the constitution. Meaux is especially adapted to nervous complaints,"—he pierced his Majesty through and through,—  
"nervous complaints, and maladies arising from brain-

worries. Your Majesty must have many such, none can doubt. In a few months you will have many, very many, more. For your own sake we hope to see you often among us, soothed and calmed amid the foliage of our beautiful department. How greatly we shall benefit thereby, I need not mention."

Verre gave him the millionth part of a second.

"These gentlemen," the Minister then resumed with a comprehensive wave, "represent all that is best and wisest in our small society. They, and their fellow-townsmen through them, bid you welcome."

There was a brief silence, broken only by the Mayor's stertorous breathing. Napoleon fancied this might be the prelude to a short harangue. In point of fact it went unconcernedly on, neither lessening nor growing greater, but keeping ever the same gentle even murmur.

So his Majesty commenced in his turn.

"I thank you, gentlemen, for your kindly welcome. I thank you for the promptitude with which it has been given. At present I am a stranger in your beautiful city, but I trust soon to wipe that reproach away. I can well believe, as Monsieur the Prefect maintains, that its calm has an especially beneficial effect upon the nerves. I have found out so much, even before he told me. We have all been through stirring times lately, and need soothing. The future, however,"—and he looked fixedly at the Prefect, who, for his part, was just then subjecting the Mayor to a somewhat severe scrutiny,—“the future, however, is likely to yield that, no less than Meaux. At present, I can foresee nothing calculated to shatter our already sufficiently broken spirits."

With this significant remark, he made an end of speaking. After a few incoherent words from the Mayor, the deputation adjourned to the dining-room, and Napoleon saw them no more.

Such expedition could have but one reward. The Emperor did not wait for the deputation to finish its lunch and depart, but passed almost immediately from the council chamber into the villa grounds. He took the only path he knew, that leading to the strip of sward beside the river and the small stone bridge. And he

sought this sacred spot without much hope,—the reason, perhaps, why his search at last succeeded.

He hardly dared believe his eyes. Yet it could be no one else. She stood at the water's edge, her back towards him, gazing intently into some placid pool. Her parasol, and an open book turned face downwards, lay a little way up the sloping bank. Of what was she thinking so earnestly, that she did not hear the beating of his heart? Her beautiful head was bent forward; did it seek some likeness of his face in the still waters? It must be so. She loved him as he loved her. His vigils in her name, his hours of agony, had gone forth,—as they always do—from heart to heart. He had seen her twice, once without speaking, he had never written. Yet she knew, inasmuch as his great love had assuredly brought her into that real spirit world, wherein it needs neither presence, nor pens nor ink, to tell one's secrets. For the rest, if she had really fashioned his face upon the surface, she did not keep it long. Lifting an arm, she loosed a pebble from her grasp, then, with her head fallen forward once more upon her breast, she relapsed into dreams.

“Mademoiselle,” he whispered, oh, so softly.

Still she did not hear. He left the path, coming closer than her book and parasol, quivering nervously all the while, but resolved not to let the chance slip by. He had been here too often already.

“Mademoiselle,” once more, and this time with trembling voice.

Mademoiselle turned full round. Her brow was heavy with something that perplexed it,—something not Napoleon, for it cleared at once.

“Ah,” said she composedly, “so it is you.”

He was a trifle taken aback by this cool reception. If she knew what he felt, and felt the same herself, she managed to conceal her love and knowledge remarkably well.

“Yes, Mademoiselle,” he murmured, “it is I; and I did not look for such a pleasure.”

She must have just then recalled the memory of their

first meeting. Her mouth twitched; she seemed desperately inclined to burst out laughing.

"Look," she cried instead, turning back abruptly to the water, and with all the apparent inconsequence of a child, "have you ever seen it so clear?"

"Never indeed,"—he was beside her now, and he could catch the reflexion of her face.

"How they glisten," she cried again; "that tiny one there, especially. Its scales might be diamonds."

"And how one envies them their element."

They spoke in English; and he regretted next minute that he had not employed a simpler term. *Element* seemed so strained; the word one expects from a man who is not "quite the thing" and knows it. But that is the worst of love, at all events in its earlier stages—three parts a paralyzing self-consciousness, and the rest one mad desire to display before the loved being all one's virtues and social advantages.

Certainly, he felt no desire yet a while to disclose his kingship. But he did want her to know that he had received his education at Winchester and Oxford; that he had been a popular member of his school, and by no means a pariah at college; that he had always been able to "draw" the largest union audiences, and that he might have done more in the rowing line, had he been less industrious. She ought to hear, besides, that he had passed through his English life incognito, a sort of fairy prince only half disguised. How explain otherwise his modified success among earls and marquises and the grandsons of defunct prime ministers and the grandfathers of prime ministers not yet born? What sort of life would he, the ward of a suburban bourgeois, have had at Magdalen, had not these guessed something of his lineage, while he as yet was ignorant? Birth, like murder, will out. De Morin could not rob him of his eloquence, his magnanimity, his noble bearing. Later on, when she did know his kingship, he would weave her a little romance showing how two especially important noblemen—neither of them Lord Mendril—had actually taxed him with using an alias. He would give names,



too, chancing it whether she knew them or not. For he felt justly that, as things stood, he might safely claim a posthumous acquaintance with half the peerage in Great Britain.

But most of all he desired to tell her about his character. Very few words on his part would suffice to show her how far he was from being either vain or conceited or a prig, despite his many accomplishments. Ah, he had tasted too deeply of the world's bitterness to be any of these things. A gentle cynicism lay deep within him; but not so deep that she should not learn all about it—in time.

And this is love! How much simpler if one could go through it without troubling the young lady. What a saving in tearful partings, blistered letters, and locks of hair! We merely inveigle a second person—with fine eyes and a white skin—into worshipping at our shrine. Well, and she is doing identically the same thing! Lucky the man who can perform his devotions without help from outside. He is self-sufficing indeed.

"Yes, truly, one envies them their element," he repeated.

The young lady was actually chewing grass. She paid not the least heed to his nervous phrases, but instead gazed across the river into space, the trace of laughter still about her lips.

"Do you live in this neighbourhood?" Napoleon asked presently.

"We are here this summer. And you?"

"I?—oh, I—I am a visitor here; that is all."

"Indeed," murmured Mademoiselle, while the smile deepened. She stuck bravely to her grass, however, and overcame it.

"It is a charming spot," he continued with growing complacency, now that he was fairly started. "And I—I fancy I have seen Mademoiselle in London."

"Very possibly."

"Are you not a daughter of the Earl of Framlingham?"

She laughed outright this time: "I had no idea I was so well known," she said.



"I assure you it was by the merest chance," he hastened to rejoin with questionable deprecation. "I happened to be dining in Jervis's restaurant one night last June. Your father and mother were there, and you were with them. The Earl's face, at least, is a familiar one to all Londoners. Seeing you side by side, I had no difficulty in finding the relationship."

She was studying his face with some care, and a puzzled look had come into her eyes.

"I do not remember," she murmured.

"Monsieur Carache, and Mervan the singer, were of the party, if I recollect rightly."

"And still I cannot remember," she persisted. He began to falter under her steady gaze.

"Your brother also made one. And you went afterwards to the opera—Lohengrin, you know; and I was in the stalls and—and—had a good view of Made—of Monsieur Carache, who sat in your box."

"No, I cannot remember."

"Ah, Mademoiselle was there many times this season," he hesitated.

"No, no, I recall the occasion perfectly. But your face—I cannot recall that."

He broke into a nervous laugh, the humility of Pimlico back upon him. "That may well be. Probably I was in a very modest corner behind one of the pillars. Jervis *has* one or two pillars, you know,—large pillars, very suitable for shrinking natures."

"It may be so," and she resumed her survey of the other bank.

"Mademoiselle sees something very interesting over yonder?" he ventured with a new note of softness.

"I was thinking," she answered gravely; and then, brushing her reveries away with strange abruptness, "It is pretty from here."

"Very pretty. We are near your father's grounds?"

"Those across the river. We have an illustrious neighbour."

"Yes. I wonder his Majesty allows strangers to roam about—pardon, Mademoiselle, I was thinking of myself. I might be a particularly dangerous conspirator."

"You! Forgive a smile, Monsieur, but you do not look like one. I think I should always trust you."

"You flatter me. Remember, however, anarchists and nihilists and the rest of them have wonderful disguises."

"Probably the Emperor has not begun to think of those things yet," she said; "they come later on."

"You would know better than I. You are his neighbour."

"We never see him. Both he and we are here very seldom."

"Is he not here now?" Napoleon asked, too intent on his own movements to notice the curious look which she gave him or the brusque laugh that accompanied her answer.

"Really, Monsieur, I cannot tell you. I do not study his doings quite so carefully."

"His story is a very romantic one," he began again. "In my opinion it is that more than anything else which recommends him to his countrymen."

"Perhaps," she answered. Next minute, very absently indeed, "He will soon be getting married. I suppose they already talk about it in Paris?"

"He will find it a difficult task. His throne is scarcely quite secure enough at present to tempt any eligible princess."

"True. His lineage, too, will hamper him."

"Oh, I do n't know about that," Bonaparte answered, a trifle ruefully. "He has Hapsburg blood in his veins."

"Dear me, no," she laughed—and he began to hate that flute note; "I wonder you make that mistake at this time of day." And with more vivacity than she had hitherto used, she proceeded to unfold to him the story of the Sartena marriage.

"Italian on both sides, you observe—Italian, with an English training. The result may be good enough in its way; but one can hardly imagine that it fits him for his present position."

"Mademoiselle studies politics?"

"No," she hastily rejoined; "I merely repeat what

my father says. He studies them"; then, with a resumption of her former indifference:

"They say he is to marry a Russian princess."

"I have not heard so."

"Perhaps I ought not to have mentioned it; the thing is not generally known. We got the report from the embassy itself."

"A good source."

"Most certainly. Monsieur Prehlen knows everything."

"More than the Emperor himself?"

"Quite likely. Men in his high position are very often puppets."

"He would be flattered to hear what Mademoiselle says."

"You may be sure I should never say as much in his presence."

"One has an idea that English young ladies always say what they think."

"Monsieur is English?"

"I was educated in England—in fact, I am an old Wykehamist. I was also at Oxford."

"At Oxford?"

"Yes. Magdalen."

"My brother's college was Christ Church. Did you come across him up there?" she asked, with perhaps something more than the delightful vagueness of all young ladies.

"No," he answered gallantly; "I fancy that I must have been a good deal senior to him. I confess I do not remember having met him."

She did not answer and he had nothing more to say. Bristling as he was with every sort of information, biographical and otherwise, he had nothing more to say. First he watched such faint reflexion as the waters gave, then let his glance steal upwards. The old look of perplexity once more covered her brow. The faint lines about her eyes were puckered, and the faint lines about her mouth. She gazed straight before her at no ascertainable object; and he might have been miles away or out of existence altogether.

Clearly, she was not thinking about him; for he stood beside her, and reveries about him would surely keep till he was gone. The Russian ambassador and the Russian embassy were not less likely—he did not give his mind free range over the entire personnel. If only he could break the ice. He had never made love before; that was the worst of it. And so she would leave him this second time as well, without finding out that she was something more to him than—than the multitude of other young ladies that clustered through the world. Surely it was not much? Yet it was more than he could do.

The next minute came the dreaded words which had hung over him all along. "I must be moving home," she cried. "Oh, dear, my book—"

"Let me." He yielded up her property with extreme reluctance; asking her as he did so if he might accompany her to the bridge. Alas, it was but a moment's respite, and he could not use it. She would not cede him an inch beyond his boundary.

"Our roads part here," she exclaimed. "*Adieu, your Majesty.*"

And she was far out of sight before he had recovered his composure.

## Chapter III

It is not given to every one to penetrate into the family circle of a genuine earl who owns a mansion off Berkeley Square and a place in Devonshire and a house in Paris (through his wife) and a villa at Meaux (also through his wife), and a garter (through his father—the late Lord having died just as that enviable distinction was coming his way) some ten years before he has rightly earned it. And his garter and his title and his dwellings are not among the least of my lord of Framlingham's distinctions. He had been ambassador in Paris for exactly four calendar months; while the Indian viceroyship never became vacant without his being nominated by Fleet Street to fill the post. Whether because of his obvious fitness, or his heavy mouth, or his tired eyes, history telleth not. The fact remains. Eight years ago, just after his sixteen weeks in Paris, a new satrap being required, no one was held to have a better chance. Lord Rensmore got it—that maternally American baron who introduced the Yankee accent in its purest form into Government House. At the expiration of his term, seven years later, our earl once again took the field. This time, an evening journal which has the greatest circulation among marquises in the United Kingdom declared him to be the only possible candidate. There was one impossible one: he got it. The Earl's name went over for future use. The occasion came quickly enough. The new vicereine could not stand the climate. Her consort trembled before the prospect of six long years in single blessedness. Many other little things cropped up to worry him. One day, when the prickly heat lay thick upon him, he sat him down and sent in his resignation. This event occurred a week prior to the commencement of our story. The new ruler



had not yet been chosen; but every one knew who it would be. And at the point of time wherewith this present chapter deals—to wit, the evening of Napoleon's arrival at Meaux and of his first meeting with Muriel—probably the only people who had an inkling to the contrary were my lord himself and my lord's good lady.

The reasons for such persistent failure were not far to seek. They take us back to his abortive embassy. That had started under the fairest auspices. Comparatively unknown before his appointment, he had come to it with a French wife and an unsullied accent at an age (forty-two) when learned juniors are commencing to rake in their earliest guineas amid the acclamations of their maiden aunts. This was in the year of jubilee. It proved the only untoward event of that festive season. His measureless pride, his coldness of manner, which was mostly diffidence, soon raised many enemies. Week by week he involved himself in some fresh little mess. And not content to let these accumulate into their own goodly pile, he must needs crown the growing edifice with a *bêtise* that nearly ended in war.

The history is quite short. He had come over to England on leave. While opening a Parish Institute at Tipton-St.-John, he made some perfectly harmless remarks anent his present employment. These leaked into the Gallic newspapers, which were pleased to take offence. Most gave him the merest lick with the rougher side of their tongues, saying that they did expect something better from the husband of their charming countrywoman, and hinting a little about crocodiles and the Nile. Our poor friend had never been crossed before in the whole of his fair-weather life. He met the reproof like an—earl. He allowed it to touch him on his weakest spot, his ungovernable temper. He went back to the Parish Institute, and gave the Gauls such a dressing as they have not had since Waterloo, of odious memory. Paris lashed herself into a ferment. Journals, without distinction of party, clamoured for his head. On the boulevards men talked gloomily of extradition, and the “Rue de Bow.” Orators in the Chamber seriously suggested a punitive expedition against Tipton; many of

them fancied that it lay near Samory's sphere of influence, and that England would not notice. A hostile mob demonstrated in front of the embassy, much to the alarm of the Honourable Charles Mendril, my lord's second son, who happened to be there from Eton, and who did not count personal courage among his accomplishments. Illustrated papers came out with full front-page crocodiles, the Mendril motto, *Gut Gewissen würrt den Bissen*, issuing from their capacious jaws. So the Earl had to resign. Lord Threpps took his place; and took his example too, being careful, above all, not to number Parish Institutes among his vices. And the incident ended. My lord's temper remained. Alas, it claims a paragraph all to itself. Congenital, as is the case with most tempers, it had been fed and fattened in a foolish home. He was the only child of his parents; and they, though honest, had been "demned silly." The late Earl, his father, rests enshrined among the pillars of the church. The good old soul was president of the House of Laymen for many years before his death. The May meetings of two decades ago used to number him among their most punctual attendants. His party went to him for bishops, and had been on the point of giving him a garter, as the most spiritual article within its gift. A soft and foolish mother and this devoted old ecclesiastic, between them, guided the lad almost to his seventeenth birthday. The modified discipline which Eton purveys to earls was denied him. Mendril Court clung to him year by year. Sycophantic tutors (mainly curates out of a job), at so much the gross, prepared him for "Smalls," which, by the way, felled him three times. Servants, his parents chief among them, ministered to all his wants and fostered his passionate temper upon indulgence, as the good people of Perigord fatten the livers of geese. Christ Church, Oxford, is always ready to continue these benevolent beginnings. Thackeray and Tennyson have dealt with a certain class of don; so the present humble stumbler must not attempt to touch it. But it still exists. From college, my lord went degreeless on the grand tour. This was in the autumn of seventy. And inasmuch as his bent lay towards hair-

breadth adventures, his grand tour resolved itself into a jaunt to capitulated Sedan. It was at a *table d'hôte* in this city that he met his fate, a certain Mademoiselle Henriette de Murinac, a young lady who even in those far-off days was short and dark, and possessed of a glistening skin. Her father, Count Gustave de Murinac, one among the former intimates of the captured Emperor, had retired in disgrace to his estates in Champagne just before the war. The girl and her mother were at Sedan to tend a wounded brother. The poor fellow died during Lord Mendril's stay, and the manner in which the dark young lady's eyes used to fill,—and overflow into her soup,—as day by day the loved life ebbed, stirred the young fellow's heart.

For it must not be supposed that my lord was all ungovernable temper and nothing else. Devoted parents and clerical tutors certainly are among the best means heaven has yet devised for inculcating the vices, the fleshly vices above all. But the Earl's youth had been singularly stainless, so stainless indeed that the flesh remained a topic which he ever shrank from touching upon with his children, to the great loss of the Honourable Charles. And as a consequence, the native kindness of his heart remained unimpaired. He was full of right feeling and tender pity, when his overbearing temper and his diffidence had not got the better of him. Violent enough when roused, his nature contained no touch of domineering. The young lady whose dark eyes used to fill with tears at the Sedan *table d'hôte*, found him a most gentle and forbearing husband. (He certainly was an indulgent father, as this history hopes to show.) From her wedding-day forward, she went her own gait entirely; and had you asked her at what point of time her husband's love had yielded place to their present strained relations, she would have found some difficulty in giving you the date. The thing had happened so silently.

To speak the bitter truth, the young man did a bad stroke of business for himself that month at Sedan. His Right Reverend father told him as much, directly the old nobleman set eyes upon Lady Mendril. The fond

and foolish mother bared undreamt of strata of her character for the benefit of the charming Henriette. No wonder that little creature always hated Tipton. Before she had been there a week, in those far-off days of honeymoon, she used to go off and weep in not too remote corners, until her hulking Walter (with his heavy mouth and his beginnings of a beard) should stumble over her and gather her to his arms, and console her and splutter out: "Really, mother!" "Really, father!" in tones, which she found extremely soothing.

But these far-off days of honeymoon soon went. The old Earl went with them. And the new one, year by year, discovered his foreign countess to be a distinct mistake. She, too, had a nice temper of her own, and there all similarity between them ended. She was a Catholic, but her Romanism had not been militant at Sedan. Her early days at Tipton had not been void of offence. Indeed her delicious disdain of all things that concerned the heavens above proved the principal cause of friction with the parents-in-law. The old people hated Papists, but they abominated pagans. They soon had reason to suspect that their dark-eyed little connection was both. But my lady grew more assiduous as the years advanced. She found the convent chapel at Sidmouth such an excellent weapon. For "what is bred in the bone,—" as all the world knows. Before he became a father, the Earl had not cared a twopenny expletive what communion she belonged to. Her earlier impieties had only made him laugh. Even now, he recalled with a smile that first Christmas day, when he and the old people had returned from church to find her devouring "*The Mysteries of Marseilles*," by clever young Zola. With the advent of his family, his feelings changed. He could not bear to see the long-robed Misery from Sidmouth prowling round his little Muriel, his little daughter whom he loved as he loved no one else in the whole world. The child was not yet five before he commenced to suspect attempts at proselytism. When she reached eleven, he would carry her into his study and tell her fables about the *Scarlet Woman*. And though, like the late Mrs. Gamp, "which as 'ow he

never mentioned no names," she grew up with the hazy notion that the lady in question, and the Countess, her mother, were one and indivisible. To get back to the latter. Her diurnals, and rosaries, and breviaries, and her attendances at "Messe," grew more and more offensive as her married life progressed. As has been already mentioned, they were potent implements in the smouldering hostility which soon sprang up between my lord and her, just as they were among its most effective causes.

Others naturally existed. She was more French than France itself; he was Tipton-St.-John to his toe-nails. The woman, vivacious and voluble, unstable as Reuben and water, dashing like a child from every subject, exchanging tears for laughter after the fashion of monkeys, and wearing what heart she had upon her sleeve: the man, silent and reserved, self-contained to the point of secretiveness. The course resolved on in some gust of passion, he stuck to with all the persistence of a steam-roller, and a tenth its noise. The difference between the two characters was national and fundamental. Her earliest dislike for him arose from her antipathy towards dull and sober England. He soon commenced to loathe France on her account. That beautiful land grew to be a fresh bond of union. My lady possessed two dwelling-places therein. One, the small Villa Henriette, on the Marne, below Meaux, she had inherited direct. The other, old Gustave's town house in the Avenue des Villiers, she had purchased from the executors of her dead brother's will, thus exercising an option also left her by her father. The villa at Meaux lodged them once perhaps in every fifth summer. Her town house she had never been allowed to occupy at all. Their sixteen weeks' fiasco in the Faubourg St. Honoré, and a week on her honeymoon, had been the sum of her sojourn in Paris during twenty-six years of married life. Berkeley Square she could have tolerated as an inferior substitute. But she merely got about six weeks there per year, while the residue of her twelve months was massacred in that odious, infamous Tipton. He laid no compulsion upon her. She was free to live in Paris from year's end to



year's end—alone. Her nature, however, was of a clinging kind.

And so the breach had widened through their married life. And to-day, when the whirligig of time had brought men round to a new Napoléon, and Madame (as befitted an ardent Imperialist) desired to resurrect the glories of her mansion, it was very wide indeed. The worthy couple now hardly exchanged half a dozen words per week. They met at meals,—a sort of “water truce,” if one may borrow from the wizard of the jungle,—and they separated. They faced one another from either end of their long table, at Tipton or Meaux, or in Berkeley Square, and talked to their guests and their children, and *at* one another. My lord would watch his wife, wondering how he had come to marry her. She never looked at him. But when so be he annoyed her more than usual, she would talk gingerly about the Paris embassy and the Tipton Institute, and her devotions, and Father Kahn. And once a month, like clockwork, she would bewail her hateful English life and her empty houses.

Their children, alas, drew them no closer. Our poor friend gathered his daughter to his heart, and left the boys to the Countess. Not that he neglected the latter. He was a just man, and an affectionate father. Walter, his heir, the young gentleman who had administered such disciplinary taps to *our* Walter, before the latter had shed his cocoon, found his lordship everything that filial exigencies can desire. Even the Honourable Charles, that unappetizing young patrician, never received cause to complain. Heaven knows, he was blotchy and sallow and squat enough to disgust the most indulgent parent.

But the Earl possessed but one daughter, and she was his all in all. From earliest times they had been inseparable. Mendril Court, accursed of Madame and the Honourable Charles, was Mecca to them. Till Muriel reached eighteen, neither of them was ever happy out of it. And, the chronicler regrets to say, they liked it best when the boys were absent at school or college, and when Madame kept sulkily to her room save for an occasional sabbatical maraud to the convent chapel.



They knew the whole country-side, those two, from the heights whence you can catch the first faint glimpse of Exeter to the red cliffs that keep Seaton from Salcombe Regis. They loved April best,—April when the evenings lengthened and Madame sighed most for Paris. They used to take their horses to the water's edge, and watch the promise of spring twilight brightening the foam, and tempt the waves with shouts of laughter,—the waves which still held a touch of winter in them. And then, as the shadows settled, they would race home, Muriel always leading, and with flying hair. And sometimes her father would call to her, "This is better than Paris, little one?"

"And Meaux too," she would laugh back, "and that trickling Marne!"

So the little creature, with her wide grey eyes and her flying hair, was banded with her father into a sort of dual alliance. And thus she came to rule the household. Not dumb and saturnine like him, she possessed his silent weight behind her, and her own indomitable little will. What he wanted, she wanted, and said so; and what she said she wanted, she generally got. Madame, truth so tell, lived somewhat in awe of her. She seemed so different from Henriette's notions of what a young girl should be. Even at thirteen the little minx displayed twists in her "foolish character" incomprehensible to my lady. And she turned them into overt action, too, whenever she and her mother came to blows. She never asked sympathy or advice. She made no attempt to conceal her scorn for the priests and devout women whom the Countess *sometimes* collected round her. No, the absurd child remained ever the same wild thing with wide eyes and flying hair and bloodless skin; and, unlike most wild things, kept some solid character not very deep below the surface, the metallic feel of which my lady did not like at all. Above all, the child had secrets with her father: the two imbeciles never being happy out of one another's presence.

"Would you believe it," Madame wrote on one occasion, now several years old, to her confidante Madame Verre, "would you believe it, dear Louise, I found

him last Saturday loafing about outside her schoolroom, waiting for Mademoiselle—who is most satisfactory, though she joins me in hating the place—to set her free. You can imagine I promptly went in and ordered that the little imp should be detained an hour after her usual time. No sooner had I turned my back, than *he* went in and carried her off then and there. And I did not see either of them again until seven that same evening (April, recollect, dear Louise, and bitterly cold), when they came clattering up the drive like a couple of maniacs. Her new serge was saturated with salt-water, and the little wretch wanted to sit down to dinner just as she was. Oh, dear Louise, these barbarians! You won't tell me Verre equals my wretch." Neither the Honourable Charles nor his elder brother were very satisfactory substitutes for a kempt and clinging daughter. The latter young nobleman has already been sufficiently described. He resembled his mother too much not to have a shallow heart. Never aught but gentle and dutiful towards his parents, neither could cherish any illusions as to his real nature. A thousand little unconscious acts daily showed it up beyond dispute. Kind words slipped from his tongue like the best lubricant invented; unchangeable kindness shone from his dark eyes (except, of course, when he had to deal with cads); but no one had ever known him to go a half-inch out of his way to oblige any living soul. He liked Muriel fairly; Charles he thought of as little as possible. Sometimes the two discussed their parents, when the young lord would invariably come to the conclusion that both had many good qualities. And also, that if each only saw the evil in the other, it was not for their seed to forget their virtues. His brother generally differed.

For the Honourable Charles had a profession that required nursing; he also had a coming career. So *he* could not possibly be gentle or amiable or too respectful. Possessing deeper feelings than his brother, he had, unfortunately, up to the present, been compelled to expend them in dislikes and hatreds and discontents. It took little indeed to drive him into fits of sullen anger that endured goodly periods. But then, it is the privilege of

men with exigent professions and possible careers not to have parents nor sisters nor brothers—but only themselves in all the wide, wide world. They don't have any friends, that is quite certain.

In public the Countess always took care to laud her children to the skies. It was one of her most indecent characteristics, in her husband's view. Privately, however, she could not help lamenting the fact that her second boy showed—to those who did not know his beautiful nature, and judged by externals—blotchy and sallow and squat, with a bull-neck and a libidinous chin. Why this should be so, she could not tell. Earl Walter was a fine enough man, while the other three members of the family were distinctly handsome. She feared his plain face might stand in the dear boy's way. The dear boy himself had no such anxiety. The only thing which seemed likely to do that, in his opinion, was his foolish, blundering father. For the Honourable Charles, though about to enter the diplomatic service, had destined himself ultimately for the Treasury Bench. He deemed himself cut out for the House of Commons. But the Honiton division of the county, where the Mendril influence lay strong, was to go to Walter. Again, if his father could only become Viceroy! The Honourable Charles would then be his private secretary, and spring into public life that way. But his father had proved himself a hopeless failure; accordingly, he disliked him very much. He, however, talked to him sometimes about his great ambitions.

"Sir," he would say, "the present time is the rule of lieutenants. We have Harcourt and Salisbury in England, and Crispi in Italy, and—and—"

Or, again:

"Sir, I wonder how I shall look on paper. Nowadays, character-sketches of public men are carried to absurd lengths. Become an Under-Secretary of State, and you will be able to get any number of hysterical journalists to analyze your inside, as though you were Pitt or Hamlet, or the latest woman who did something she ought not to have done. I wonder how I shall look on paper, sir."

Or, again:

"Sir, the great secret of Mr. Rodenham's success lies in the fact that he used to work nineteen hours a day when he had nothing to do. There is no merit in the Attorney-General always being busy. There is great merit in the briefless barrister. The latter will reach the woolsack first, if you will pardon a trope from common things. I, sir, work twenty-two hours out of the twenty-four."

And his father would invariably answer:

"Charles, do n't be a fool."

Madame's own private relations brought hardly more comfort. Of old Gustave's hordes, some were dead, like poor Paul (whom she never thought of without tears), and all save one were scattered. Louis de Murinac, the youngest, alone remained in the old home at Avize among the vines. He had married a Swiss woman from Lausanne, and she and he and their two children, Paul and Yvonne, lived a placid, drowsy sort of life in the grim old château. Louis himself was a confirmed idler. He spent his day walking to a neighbouring railway station for the Paris papers, and pottering among his books. These were very numerous, and all dealt with the times and life of Louis XIV. De Murinac had collected them at great expense, during the last seventeen years or so, to help him carry out the purpose, the grand purpose, of his life. This was nothing less than a compendious history of that great monarch. Up to the present, however, he had only written the preface and a skeleton index. The authorities were so terrible. One book of reference led to a thousand more. By the time the thousandth had been purchased and read, the first was altogether forgotten. Then there were the Paris papers. What these had in common with Louis XIV, it took a man of De Murinac's ingenuity to tell. But he went along, quite satisfied that no one can be an historian unless he keeps up with current topics. So he had four of the leading journals daily, and worked diligently through them, hardly missing an advertisement, and taking copious notes. His method left nothing to be desired: he had reached his forty-second note-book.

But seeing that the papers did not get to Avize till close on noon, and that the station was four miles from the château; and seeing further, that a man who aspires to be an historian must take exercise and regular meals, it always came about that he was never ready to tackle his namesake till five of an afternoon. He would then lock himself in his library, and proceed to tackle him. But, having added another word to the skeleton index, he always concluded that he owed it to his reputation, as well as to his readers, not to write any more so late. Accordingly, he salved his conscience by altering the current scheme to account for another wasted day.

Oh, those schemes! On paper he parcelled out day and night with scrupulous exactitude. Such had been his habit from earliest infancy. They ran something after this wise: "*Scheme of life*, begun on such and such a day of such a year, and kept down to the commencement of my last mortal illness." Then the document proceeded to enact minute regulations for every department of human doings, sleep included.

So each day at four he altered the date, and when the programme became too illegible he wrote a new one. This generally took about an hour. Which labour done, he would settle down to a cosy evening among the more scandalous chronicles of his period. They had to be read some time; hence he preferred to get them through and docketted before his new scheme came into operation.

His boy Paul, now approaching his thirteenth year, was a different stamp of man altogether; but Madame never did care for children. Besides, she only saw her brother and her brother's family about once in four years. He could never be got to Tipton.

But we have left Meaux and our hero long enough. The night he first set eyes upon this interesting family (at Jervis's Restaurant, it may be remembered), the Countess had just scored a notable victory. She had prevailed upon her husband to pass the summer at Meaux. The point was won only after twelve days' fighting and three years' absence. She had fought it



more on Charles's account than her own; the dear boy proposing to join the Paris embassy after September.

Curiously enough, the Framlinghams arrived at their charming country seat on the identical day in late July that Napoleon reached his. The troop of them, including Louis de Murinac and Count Nicholas Fersen (who came uninvited), actually left Paris two trains in front of his Majesty. Muriel had not even assisted at the unpacking of her trunks, when she fell in with him for the first time across the river.

Dinner that night at the Villa Henriette partook of the nature of a family reunion. Louis de Murinac was there, and he and his sister had not met for over four years. Fersen was there, and he and Muriel had not met for over eight weeks. He had n't been asked. That made no difference; he had come to stop the night.

The history of this young attaché's devotion to Lord Framlingham's daughter is simplicity itself. Napoleon had not misread his secret that night at Jervis's. Had our hero been present at this cheerful table, he would have seen that every one else read it too. Happily for him, the monarch was moaning and groaning in his own little villa, half a mile off.

The history of the boy's intimacy with the Framlingham family is less straightforward, and justifies, perhaps, a few words' detailed explanation. It originated in a letter of introduction. Some six years back, the Earl had taken advantage of a visit to Berlin to get a month in St. Petersburg. The month in St. Petersburg tempted him on to Moscow. And from Moscow he had gone to shoot over the domain of the widowed Baroness Fersen, Nicholas's mother. The latter, then a lad of sixteen, had been my lord's constant companion in their daily excursions. For some reason he would single out this taciturn Englishman from the rest of the sportsmen—usually his uncles and cousins, of which he had a good many—and stick to him like a limpet through the live-long day. Why, it is difficult to say. There only existed one child for whom the Earl had any very special attractions, and she was down with German measles over in the sea-spider's lair. Possibly the boy had learnt

that his guest was to be the next Indian viceroy, and therefore knew also that they would meet again. Anyhow, he stuck to him, and polished his French on him, and now and then gave him a little Russian, which the Englishman put by for future use. And the boy showed him where the capercailzie nested among the rotting autumn leaves. And his manifest devotion flattered my lord, as devotion flatters any one, even his Beatitude the Grand Lhama, provided he gets any. And it minded the Earl that his usual companion was about the same age as this sturdy youth who trudged at his side, and that she also had fearless eyes of grey. And when, sometimes, the two of them had got deep into the forest, some way from the uncles and cousins,—whose host Nicholas was,—the Earl would tell him about his daughter over in England, which was a very great mark of confidence indeed. So the fortnight ended, and Framlingham hied him back to the German measles, carrying the very liveliest recollections of his young companion. Two years later Nicholas paid a return visit to Tipton. The friendship thus started promised to endure.

Henriette had found him charming from the very commencement. She ventured to write as much to the dear Baroness, his mother, who answered in faultless French, and violet ink. Then came the boy's appointment to his Paris embassy, about twelve months prior to the *coup d' état*. That brought him well within the lie of Devonshire. The Havre-Southampton route proved a very good friend. And every one commenced to know why he was so fond of Tipton-St.-John, and *she* as much as anybody. And he knew that she knew it; though he had never yet dared speak to her about his love.

He had loved her from the hour of their earliest meeting, on the occasion of his first visit. He remembered the incident well. She was seventeen at the time; he a year her senior. She had worn the serge which she had saturated on a former occasion, and her face had borne the tiniest trace of colour; for she had ridden with her father to the lodge gate to welcome the young Russian upon their threshold.

From that first meeting forward, then, he loved her.

And his love grew with every sight. His mother was driven permanently to an antiquated photograph whenever she wanted to remind herself of his comely features. The forests near Moscow—Dmitroff was the name of his native place—knew him no more. Prehlen, his chief, found him most neglectful. But Prehlen did not mind; his methods differed from those employed in neighbouring embassies.

This was Muriel's first visit to France since his appointment. No wonder he attached himself to her train from the moment she alighted at the Terminus Hotel, and dogged her down to Meaux without an invitation.

My lord's feelings in the matter can be summed up in wellnigh a single sentence; so can my lady's. He did not want his daughter to marry yet a while. And—and one cannot deny it, Russia is a long way off. But he never lost his first affection for the boy. Rather it strengthened as the years went on. For he found him honest and fearless and manly. Accordingly, he had no objection, and meant to leave the choice entirely to her. My lady, for her part, felt that with her face and parentage the girl might hope to do a good deal better. But then, she was such an impudent little minx, that really Henriette hardly cared what she did. Meanwhile, Nicholas still adored in silence, and they all sat at the cheerful dinner, which partook of the nature of a family reunion. For it also included Walter, gathered in from the Faubourg St. Honoré, where—as Madame informed “dear Louise”—the young monkey had been behaving rather indiscreetly with that contemptible Lady Threpps. And it numbered last, but not least, the Honourable Charles, who had turned up that morning from a solitary ramble among the Jura “to collect ideas.”

With the exception of Fersen, they were all very lively. Even my lord unbent. He and his Countess exchanged one or two civil words. Louis, soft, amiable fellow that he was, gave his home news with charming desultoriness. He had silken chestnut hair and a pointed beard and regular features, but a fatal weakness lingered over all and negatived those advantages. He told his

sister what a charming child Yvonne had grown, and all about the skeleton index; and what a terrible little Imperialist he was rearing in Paul. The child's present excitement upset the whole château. He positively wanted to be enrolled in the Emperor's body-guard there and then, laughed Louis. And that sent Henriette off musing on dear old days, and the Avenue des Villiers.

"I notice, dear Louis," said she, "a certain Count de Morin who appears to have had a considerable share in the late glorious restoration."

"I also observe the name; and may add that I have made a note of it for my history," Louis replied. "You refer to the Grand Chamberlain?"

"I wonder whether he can be any relation to our old Count?"

"I thought of that."

"What a dear, kind man he was," the sister continued, her eyes softening. "Do you recollect how we used to take complete possession of his apartment and declare it in a state of siege? Poor Paul—always the ringleader; hours do I sit thinking of those dead days. How the Count loved our darling."

"Oh, I must have forgotten. I was too young to remember the things you mention."

"Nonsense," Henriette rejoined tartly; "you were past fourteen when we left Paris. Curious, we should none of us ever have set eyes on the dear Count since that feverish day. He must be dead this many a year."

"I expect so," Louis said in comforting tones.

"How does my little girl like Meaux, now that she's got here?" asked my lord. The tactless creature replied, "Not very much," adding that she pined for the sea. Her candour broke the first beginnings of harmony at that festive board. The Countess bridled at once.

"Naturally," she exclaimed, fixing Louis's blonde beard with glittering eyes, "I might have expected that Muriel would grudge me my visit to my old home" (which latter substantive was poetic license). "Many weary months do I have to await her pleasure in that soaking Tipton; but my turn, it seems, never comes."

"Oh, mother—"

"It is unnecessary," Henriette pursued, her orbs still fixed on Louis, "it is quite unnecessary to expostulate. Deeds, not words, are what I judge by. Since July the first, of last year, I have spent three weeks in Cannes, six weeks in London, and the rest of the twelve months in that living tomb. My dearest Charles, how did you enjoy the Jura? Sweet boy, you have not told me one word of yourself."

"I'm all right," grumbled the favourite. And he turned at once to Count Fersen, who was immersed in the sayings and doings of his beloved.

"Nicholas, what does your chief think of affairs?"

The Russian did not trouble to look round; he hated the Honourable Charles. "I do not know," he snapped out.

"I think dear Walter's experience was the most extraordinary," broke in Madame. "Dearest, give your uncle your adventures with his Majesty."

"Oh please, mother," pleaded the charming young fellow, "please spare me another recital. I have told the story about nine hundred times already."

So Madame told it for him. How he had been up at Oxford with this strange imperial foundling. How the two of them had travelled to Paris in the same compartment, that memorable night in June when Walter Sadler was really on his way to win his throne. How they had met frequently during the few weeks prior to the *coup d'état*; and how, on one occasion, dear Walter had been able to perform a trifling service for his namesake in connection with the dance at the British embassy. She narrated these incidents just as our hero would have had them narrated, had he been present; and the gentle young lord listened and did not even smile. Count Fersen heard never a word.

Madame wound up.

"Another coincidence. Our dear Louise Verre and her husband also became very intimate with this Walter Sadler. His Majesty remembers Walter Sadler's friends. Verre, as you know, is almost the sole new minister; and Louise writes me he is soon to be Premier. Indeed, I hear on all sides the young fellow is really charming.



Dear Charles, your brother's good luck will help you immensely."

"Oh, I do n't know," grumbled the saffron-coloured lad.

"This week's *L'Illustration*," Madame rattled on, "contains a portrait of him. Have you seen it? Walter says that it is a good likeness."

Louis had not seen it, so his sister continued:

"I read in the papers that he means to come down to the Villa Yvonne this summer. He will find it sadly out of repair; the President never even knew of its existence. Oh, dear, they will be gay in Paris this winter! Louis, you may buy my house—" Her husband was gazing so benignantly at the chandelier that she kept the remainder of her sentence over for future use.

"Well, my boy," the latter said at that moment, breaking his long silence, "has the Jura helped you to make up your mind?"

"Yes, sir," Charles replied. "I shall accept, and go in October."

"Like a wise fellow. Let me tell you, you would not get many men to work a thing in your favour as Lord Threpps offers to do."

"I know, sir." But this was the pattern of the dutiful lad's mind, while he was giving such gentle acquiescence:

"The old muff will miss this vacancy just as he did the others. We shall never get to India. A second-secretaryship is better than no bread. That pig, Fersen, seems to thrive on his. He and Muriel are about on a par. I wish to heaven he'd take her off to Moscow, married or single. I should be well rid of them. The fool looks business to-night." And, as a matter of fact, the Honourable Charles, with an acumen befitting a coming premier, had smashed down the right nail. The young Russian not only looked business: he meant it. The late two months of absence had convinced him that he really could not get on without her any more. So he had spent weeks writing reams to his mother. The Baroness preferred a daughter-in-law in Dmitroff to her son always in Devonshire. She sent back any number

of motherly blessings, all in faultless French, and violet ink. The young fellow had taken his final resolve that very night he and Walter Sadler had made one another so angry. (Our hero probably did not know how near he had come to having his nose whacked on that interesting occasion.) Nicholas had confided in Lord Mendril; and they had decided that the first evening at the Villa Henriette would be a fitting opportunity. That was the reason for the former's unrequested presence.

The family took their coffee on the lawn that night, and the good-natured Walter gave his prospective brother-in-law a lift. The latter was standing disconsolately in the centre of the croquet-pitch, watching—well, we need not say what. Henriette and her brother had settled to rest in easy-chairs underneath a pear tree; while the Earl and the Honourable Charles were slowly pacing the gravel walk behind them. Muriel had just dropped her father's arm: she was now standing by Madame's chair, running through the latest *L' Illustration*. Its front page seemed to amuse her very much.

Mendril approached the unhappy young Russian and nudged his arm.

"Nicholas," he said, "you get more timid and foolish every day. Pluck up your courage, man: she can't eat you. Muriel, put away that little yellow image—" he meant the presentment of his Majesty—"and come with us. We are going down to the river."

So Muriel put Napoleon away, and joined her brother. And the worldly fellow slipped off to write some letters before they had gone a hundred yards; and the two survivors continued their course alone, and one was smiling.

He had been with her like this half a hundred times during the three and three quarter years of their acquaintance and his love, and he had never been dumb before. It was most annoying, just as he had made up his mind to speak his heart. They reached the water's edge in silence: they struck it almost opposite the spot where she and the little unknown had had their meeting, less than two hours back.

"Look!" said she, pointing across the river, "you

can see the lights of the Villa Yvonne. Perhaps the Emperor is already there," and she laughed.

"I hope not," he muttered; "the little beast."

She laughed again. "Nicholas, you do not seem to like his Majesty."

"I met him when he was plain Monsieur Sadler."

"Well?"

"He did not strike me as a nice fellow in those days."

"I do not agree with you." It was her way to tease him; he merely said: "His portraits give you no proper idea."

"But I have—" and she laughed yet once more. "Walter says the one in this week's *L'Illustration* is fairly faithful."

"May be." And Nicholas's brain reverted to his own business.

The stone bridge tempted them across into the Emperor's grounds. They ascended the sloping path towards the villa lights; and even came near enough to descry a dumpy little figure upon the first-floor balcony, whom both were at no pains to recognize.

"Muriel," the young man flung out, at length. "I heard from my mother yesterday."

"Did you, Nicholas? Surely there is nothing wonderful in that?"

"But she spoke about you."

"And that is not wonderful, either," said the girl. He always loved her ten times more for these little tokens of conscious sovereignty she was accustomed to indulge in from time to time. "She knows what a great goose her boy is. Father and I are going straight to Dmitroff directly we get into Russia. We have mapped out our tour. Moscow and your mother to begin with, then Nijni-Novgorod, and a full month in St. Petersburg to end up. You are going to be with us the whole time. You shall interpret for us and do our shopping. And perhaps, if we have the chance, we will spend a week in those vast forests of yours, where you and father seemed to have struck up your friendship. "Did I ever tell you"—she had, about a hundred times—"what an impression you made on him the first time you met? For

months after, he never tired of saying what a manly creature you were, how independent and brave, and yet how gentle. He quite horrified the boys by wishing that they had had a little more of you in them. He did not know what a great goose you were in reality. But I know; do n't I, Nicholas?"

Nicholas's eyes were glistening.

"Won't you and your father come this autumn?" he cried. It was then that they got nearest to the Emperor's villa, and saw the outline of the dumpy figure. They turned their faces once more to the river and their own domain.

"Won't you come to Russia this autumn? I am going. I have promised my mother; and there is my examination in November. Excepting for those three or four days, the whole of my time shall be devoted to you."

"It is worth considering," the girl answered gravely. "We must see what father says. I am afraid he will have had enough of the Continent for one year."

"Muriel, he will go if only you want it very much." Fersen pleaded.

"But I am not sure whether I *do* want it very much," she laughed. "I must think about it a bit first."

"Oh, Muriel."

"Nicholas, you are a terrible egotist. You are frightened to make the cold journey all by yourself. There is another thing,"—dropping her voice—"father's chances really are pretty decent this time. We may all of us have to start for India in December: how would you like that, goose?"

"I should not like it at all," he groaned.

"Mind, you must not breathe a word to a living soul. I have been horribly indiscreet to tell you. I know you will give the news to Prehlen; and he will sell it to the Tsar. Well, I have put you on your word of honour. Nothing is settled for certain; nothing beyond this, that father saw Mr. Rodenham on Sunday night, and heard then that his chance was as good as any one's.

"I really do not know what I shall do, if you go to India," moaned Nicholas.

"Come too, stupid. Monsieur Prehlen won't mind;

you can send him secrets from Government House. You may be of more use that way than you are at present. Father says you 're the idlest young attaché he 's ever seen. Charles is quite shocked with you."

"I hate Charles," he snapped out.

Muriel's reproof lacked conviction.

"He is not respectful to your mother," Nicholas retorted.

"But he is her favourite."

"Then why does he speak to her so rudely? I never address my mother in that way. And he cringes to his father."

"Ah, that is because they are not on very good terms."

"His conceit is unfathomable."

"Charles is very clever. He is going to be a great man some day."

"How did he come to fail in his university examinations? Walter got through."

"You are a spiteful old thing. You sha'n't malign him any further. You must try and like him. And you will be kind to him this winter, for my sake."

"I 'll be kind to him," he grumbled; "but like him I never can. Muriel," and his voice resought the old softness, "Muriel, I heard from my mother yesterday."

Her voice softened too, though somewhat against her will. She could but feel sorry.

"So you told me, Nicholas."

"And, Muriel, she—she—knows all."

"Does she, Nicholas?"

"I told her everything."

"Oh, Nicholas, I am afraid you are a great, great goose."

"She knows everything, Muriel, and she approves. She gives her unqualified consent."

"What to, pray?" cries Muriel.

"You know I love you."

"Yes, silly boy, I know," once more quite low.

"Won't you be my wife?"

The question which had hovered on his tongue this two years past was out at last. And they reached the



bridge while he spoke. They halted underneath the flickering lamp. It had shone down upon another of her admirers not so long ago. "Answer me, Muriel. Do you not love me?"

"Oh, Nicholas," she pleaded, "really I do not know."

## Chapter IV

Napoleon soon discovered how quickly time slips by for the man with an engrossing occupation. Instead of returning to Paris upon the Sunday evening, as he had half promised Brisson, he lingered on from day to day in this enchanting neighbourhood. A second Sunday was already close at hand.

Not that his success justified so protracted an absence from business. The girl gave him no direct encouragement; and he was forced to extract as much comfort as he could from the fact that he occasionally found her in his grounds. In love, we argue much from slender premises: he took it she did not view his suit with absolute disfavour.

But even this solacement proved of a diluted kind. For days together, he caught no glimpse of this loved being, though he loitered about the usual spot until a late and often chilly hour. The third evening, perhaps, after a couple such total disappearances, he would come upon her reclining at full length with a book in front of her (as she had lain just prior to that second interview of famous memory), or strolling along the river path, flinging stones lazily into the still lazier pools. She always greeted him calmly, and with half-impudent surprise; though she must have known full well that he came here every evening on one exclusive errand, and counted it a day lost and not worth the living, when it failed of success. At times indeed—and this was the nearest approach to direct encouragement he could ever get—she would allow the merest tinge of dominion to colour her attitude towards him, asking him to perform trifling services that were absolutely unnecessary; and this for no other conceivable reason—so it seemed to him—than

to show even the trees and river and the evening sky the sway exercised by a fragile girl of twenty over a mighty emperor. Beyond this, his exalted position seemed to make no impression upon her. She treated him with absolute and unquestionable disrespect, never giving him any title, unless, as sometimes happened, he had been induced by her pretty little assumptions of sovereignty to employ, on his part, tones of increasing tenderness. Then indeed, by means of frigid but never exaggerated politeness, she would recall him to his senses.

Either she was fortunate in her ingenuousness, or else very, very clever; for she could have adopted no means more calculated to fascinate and enslave. Each hour her lover sank deeper into the morass of infatuation. It was a complete surrender of body and soul. Apart from her, he could do naught but think on the next meeting; in her presence, he was paralyzed by the dread of a speedy parting. Godefroy found that his powers of application had disappeared entirely, and the old man felt sick at heart, as much for the living cause of so much idleness as for the idleness itself.

"Poor thing! poor thing!" he would mutter five or six times a day in the privacy of his own peculiar chamber, which already managed to resemble the green-room of a transpontine theatre; "emperors and kings are dangerous folk to play with, and this young woman will fare like all the rest." He had seen her, and felt almost a father's pity towards her fragile beauty and innocent face.

Moreover, Godefroy was a stanch Brissonite, who laboured under the conviction that any delay in taking the offensive meant ruin to France. But like a wise man, and one possessing deep knowledge and experience of his brethren, he refrained from all remonstrance. He left Napoleon severely alone, obeying his slightest order, indeed, with the utmost punctuality; but not venturing upon those small conversations, which up till now had imparted a genial flavour to their mutual relations, besides affording his Majesty an excuse for many a morning spent in idleness.

But on a certain sultry afternoon (perhaps the tenth of their sojourn there), as the genial fellow lay in his basement room, gazing disconsolately at a dust-begrimed vignette of Sarah Bernhardt, and feeling sick to death with worry and weariness, a brilliant idea shot across his brain. The clouds cleared from his brow almost by magic. Writing generally came as an abomination to him, yet he sprang without a moment's hesitation to a small desk in an unobtrusive corner, and flung himself full length over a sheet of blue-lined paper which slowly—very slowly—took the shape of an urgent missive. It was to Marshal Brisson, and it implored the latter to come forthwith to Meaux to protect national interests seriously imperilled. It was, furthermore, for Godefroy, exceedingly long and eloquent. Save in times of stress, his letters were like his utterances—laconic; and he felt considerable surprise, and no small amount of pride, when he surveyed the four closely written sides of mingled warning and entreaty produced by an hour's unremitting toil. The concluding paragraph, in his opinion, showed especial acuteness.

"An additional danger," so he wound up, "threatens us from the fact that this poor girl is half-English. Might she not—or rather, might not her father, the insolent Earl of Framlingham—use her growing power to betray us? Do not hesitate a moment, I beseech. Already some uncanny spirit whispers me that this may be the beginning of the end."

Godefroy covered the back of the envelope with red sealing-wax, and the wax with numberless impressions taken from an unwieldy bronze and agate seal, which had in earlier days stamped the death-warrants of the *Théâtre du Peuple*. This completed, the valet summoned the most trustworthy among his subordinates and sent him off as a special messenger to Paris. Then he threw himself once more upon his baize sofa to await the Minister's reply.

Nor did he have to wait long. Near eleven the same evening, while he was making ready to carry up the candles, Brisson walked unannounced into his room.

The Minister of War looked gaunt and soldierly as

ever; no trace of emotion over his thin face. His voice, when he spoke, was equally unconcerned. "Aha, Godefroy," said he, nodding slightly, "here I am. I know you are not the man to write 'urgent' without good cause."

The butler turned slowly round from his candles and surveyed the new-comer with a countenance no less impassive. "Marshal," he exclaimed, "you remove a load from my mind. Be seated. And pray—pray excuse me for a few minutes." He shambled off with the Emperor's night-lights, saw to all his master's requirements, tested a few bolts and shutters, and then returned, always deliberately, to this quasi-midnight conference.

Their conversation lasted until close upon twelve. Godefroy's narrative came slowly, but it was full of local colour, and the Marshal listened to him without interruption. The whole history of the intrigue soon lay bare before him. The valet had heard from Napoleon of the earlier meetings, both in London and by the river-side on the first afternoon of their arrival. What later ones had taken place he could not tell; but this he knew, that the Emperor went every day towards the river, and that they were lingering on here without open purpose. He passed on from this recital of his master's infatuation to a description of the girl's innocent beauty. Brisson interrupted him with an exclamation of disgust.

"Faugh!" he cried in an abrupt manner not usual with him, "Godefroy, where are your brains? I have not seen this fairy, but your description convinces me that she is a scheming, designing adventuress, notwithstanding her blue blood, on which you seem to lay such stress. Why, you must have come across many a score of her sort in your day."

"I am an older man than you," Godefroy rejoined harshly; "and as you say, I have seen women of all sorts in my time. Mark my word, Marshal Brisson, this girl is as delicate and pure and innocent as—"

"Oh, never mind her. At present we have to think only about *him*. Finish your tale."

So the valet finished his tale,—with sullenness now, but no change of pace,—and Brisson sat for a while, after it was ended, wrapt in thought.



"It is no use," said he at last, breaking a long silence, "I must speak with his Majesty at once."

"Quite impossible. The Emperor went to bed an hour ago."

"I will beg an interview the first thing in the morning."

"More and more absurd," Godefroy returned with acrid monotony. The other's remarks about Muriel had ruffled him.

"Why is it absurd?" asked the Marshal.

"His Majesty will stand no hectoring from you. He would bid you mind your own business, and want to know, besides, why you came here uninvited. No, no, not even that poor little master of ours is likely to tolerate dictation on such a subject."

Brisson passed a hand across his brow with a gesture betokening absolute impotence. "I am afraid you are right," he groaned. Then, caught by a sudden burst of unconquerable anger, he sprang to his feet and strode to and fro about the room.

"I made him, I made him," he cried, savagely; "and behold his gratitude! But for me, he might have found himself compelled to return to his miserable London garret. Why did I risk my head,—the blood of countless better men? He is not—"

The Minister came to a broken ending from sheer emotion. Godefroy gave him a few minutes' grace in case he might desire to add anything. He did not, but instead threw himself wearily into his chair. So the valet began:

"Do not let us be foolish. There must be a plan somewhere, and we shall not get at it by shouting up and down the room like maniacs. Now I make this suggestion: you go straight to the young lady herself and—"

Brisson sprang bolt upright.

"The very thing. I will go to-morrow."

"Then there is nothing more to be said," the old fellow answered, rising, "except that I am dead tired, and it is close on midnight."

Brisson rose too, and suffered a candlestick to be thrust into his hand. His thoughts were far away;

so far indeed that the valet was tempted to ask abruptly:

"How will you deal with Mademoiselle?"

"I shall beg of her in the interests of our dear country. If that fails, I shall venture to remind her of her good name. If *that* fails, I shall warn her"—here his eyes kindled—"that France of to-day has neither love for kings' mistresses nor fat places for their bastards."

"Take care, take care," said Godefroy; and he sought his own chamber, not quite so satisfied with his afternoon's work as he had hoped to be.

The Minister of War took breakfast in his bedroom, and set about his errand immediately this meal was ended. He chose the most roundabout way, keeping along the high road and by-lanes, in order not to pass through the grounds which lay directly underneath the library window. Even then his visit was an early one; and Monsieur Pons, the hall porter of the Villa Henriette, made no effort to conceal the suspicion wherewith he regarded the tall, ungainly man who stood quite at his ease beneath the glass-roofed porch, and demanded—not even apologetically—an interview with the Lady Muriel.

Brisson's card, however, sufficed to soothe the zealous domestic. The Minister was ushered into a small waiting-room, while Pons went off to inform his mistress of her distinguished visitor. He speedily returned, and desired his Excellency, with many bows, to follow him to Mademoiselle's boudoir.

"She is accessible, for a future empress," the visitor muttered grimly, as he obeyed.

Lady Muriel's boudoir had, once upon a time,—and that not so long ago—been Lady Muriel's schoolroom; for she was but just now grown altogether free of compulsory education. Signs of its quondam scholastic character still lingered; and the first thing that the Minister noticed upon entering was a large globe which stood in the embrasure of an oriel window. It appeared to consist of some soft, cork-like substance; small flags were stuck about it in disordered and apparently planless profusion. The western hemisphere was uppermost. With his keen glance Brisson could see distinctly that two

flags, the tricolour and the union jack, were stuck side by side in the very heart of France. His brain, however, was less keen. He found no significance in this geographical demarcation.

He turned at once to the young girl, who stood expectant beside the door. She still held his card; and the bright flush which had not yet died from out her cheeks, lending lustre to the eyes, made him look at her with added interest. In this case, his brain was more acute. "God alone knows what she thinks my errand is," he murmured.

"Marshal Brisson desires to speak with me?"

"If Mademoiselle will allow?"

She motioned him to a chair, which he would have much rather foregone, feeling, as he did, that his present task needed his full six-foot. The girl herself remained standing beside the globe, and within the windowed recess.

For all her high-bred bearing, she could not quite conceal the smile that played about her mouth and lent so great a charm to her youth. But it was a smile which died away by pin-points as Brisson proceeded.

Never very eloquent, he spoke to-day with the utmost difficulty, sometimes hesitating a minute or two for a single word. But it must be confessed that his errand was a delicate one. Now that he found himself face to face with the girl, he kept wondering how he had ever had the temerity to seek an interview upon such meagre grounds.

"Mademoiselle," he began forlornly, gazing the while with undue concentration into the crown of his hat,— "Mademoiselle cannot but be aware of the impression which she has made upon the Emperor?"

Mademoiselle made no answer. Only the smile deepened. As for Brisson, he did not notice her face, inasmuch as he was still busy with his hat. He took the silence to imply an admission of his premises.

"But does Mademoiselle reflect that any distraction at this moment may turn the Emperor from imperative duties, and prove, perchance, disastrous to our beautiful France?"

By the time he had finished, the smile was gone entirely, leaving the face as motionless as marble.

"I am English," she answered coldly.

"Ah, yes," he urged, still all persuasion; "but there is some of our blood in your veins. And France gives you a beautiful home."

"We pay for it, Monsieur," she replied with a cheerless laugh.

This schoolgirl answer and her grating manner nearly stung him into an impatient rejoinder. But, though no De Morin, he was diplomat enough to recognize that he was already and altogether on the wrong tack. Accordingly he very wisely bridled his tongue and suffered a minute to elapse in silence.

When he spoke again, it was in a modulated, wellnigh honeyed manner, common enough among many of his countrymen, but hardly in keeping with his own stern and flinty appearance.

"There is something that a young girl should love even more than her country," said he, now looking her fairly in the face—"her honour. Believe me, my dear young lady, you imperil it by even thinking of the Emperor. He could never marry you, however sorry he might feel for having wronged you. He may grow to—nay, perhaps to-day he loves you tenderly enough; but in his love lies your danger. You alone can guard yourself. Just as you alone will be to blame, if this ends in your disgrace and the shame of a noble family."

Her face had grown ashen.

"This is intolerable!" she cried shrilly. "How do you know that I have exchanged a single word with your parvenu Emperor?"

"You did not deny it a few moments back."

"Oh, well, if I have," she went on vehemently, like a passionate child who hardly knows what she is saying, "it is his fault, not mine. I do n't seek him out. He forces himself upon me. Besides,"—and these next words were uttered with great disdain,—"I should think that a Mendril might be trusted to guard her honour against the wiles of a little attorney."

There was something so childish, so immature, so im-

potent, about her rage, that for the life of him he could feel nothing but a half contemptuous pity in return. In addition, he was more than twice her age, and he would have thought it shame to have been angered by her, had her methods been ten times as skilful. But either he underrated her capabilities or, overestimated his own powers of endurance.

"If I have done you wrong," he said gravely, "I am truly sorry. My desire in this matter is to serve you no less than my master. If, however, on the other hand—and your anger seems to me to bear out this latter alternative,—I am right, and you *are* jeopardizing your good name, then I beg you to pay heed to my warning."

"And I, in return, beg you to relieve me of your presence," she replied, with a deliberation which strove to resemble his, "you have been guilty of an unpardonable rudeness, thus to force your way into a private house and insult a defenceless girl." Her passion once more got the better of her, shaking her slender frame from head to foot. "If my father or my brothers were here," she cried, "they should whip you. But of course you take good care to come when they are away from home. You French are all alike. You need the Germans back to show the world that bullies are always cowards."

An oath leapt to his lips. "We French will show in good time whether we are cowards or not. For the rest, Mademoiselle, be sure of this: we have not re-established the Empire to benefit harlots or royal bastards." And with this cruel insult he turned upon his heels and quitted room and house, without bestowing so much as a nod in acknowledgment of Monsieur Pons's elaborate bow.

To do him justice, his anger was mainly shame for his unwarrantable words. After all, *her* outburst had not been altogether without justification; while no taunt, however bitter, could excuse his own. So he returned to the Villa Yvonne full of blind rage, and Godefroy obtained the merest skeleton of the fiasco.

Brisson,—the calm, precise, soldierly Brisson,—instead, strode up and down the pantry like a caged tiger suddenly become talkative.



"I will go to Turkey," he said fiercely, "and offer my sword there. France is no place for me, nor for any one who is a man. I will leave it, and try and forget it."

When Muriel returned from her morning walk—not that they all took her into other people's parks—she found a stout and elderly gentlemen waiting patiently at the farther end of the hall for what seemed nothing in particular. His eyes were closed, and as she passed him on her way to the drawing-room, she took stock of his close-cropped iron-grey hair, his fat, ruddy face, his shining alpaca coat, and the soft white Panama hat with broad black silk ribbon which lay some little distance in front of him upon the tessellated pavement. Indeed, the last-named article nearly tripped her up, for the hall was badly lighted, and dark on the brightest days.

"Is it Mademoiselle the daughter of the house?" he asked softly, with eyes peering forth from such narrow slits she could hardly believe that he was awake.

"Yes," she replied.

"Then may I have a word with Mademoiselle in private?"

"Pons!" she cried, turning angrily to the hall porter,—  
"Pons, I thought I ordered you not to let any strangers in! What is the meaning of this?" and she pointed disdainfully at Godefroy, who kept his seat with stolid unconcern.

Monsieur Pons hurried forward, all zeal and anxiety.

"This is only a gentleman from the library at Meaux. He comes to change my lady's books."

"I have no subscription," she said with contempt.  
"You have no business here, sir. Be good enough to go this instant."

Pons, meanwhile, had again withdrawn to a discreet distance. He was a little man, and one with a horror of bloodshed; Godefroy seized the opportunity.

He rose, and advanced a step towards her.

"Of course I will depart, if Mademoiselle so desires it. But may I not first set right this morning's terrible mistake?"

It was the persuasiveness of Gôt and Bernhardt rolled

into one, and yet restrained within the limits of a simple intensity that was absolutely devoid of gesture. And she, who scarcely knew the great originals, could not fail to be touched and moved from her set purpose.

Moreover, she yearned for some apology, some comparatively healing salve for the unmanly wound which Brisson had inflicted. Were they altogether undeserved, these insults which he ought never to have uttered? She did not feel quite easy on that score. Truly the first meeting was innocent enough. It occurred on the day of her arrival in France. She had never before knowingly set eyes upon the Emperor; and she had no means of recognizing the sallow little figure whose soliloquy she interrupted by the river-side. But behold! at home, that same evening, on opening the front page of the new *L'Illustration*, she came across the yellow unknown once more face to face, and there could be no further doubt as to his identity. Yet two days later she permitted herself to wander back into the Park Yvonne, and ask questions about Russian princesses! And then, when she had let him know that she knew who he was, she still met him,—rarely indeed, and always by accident, and only for a few minutes each time; but in love, as in law, the principle is the thing; and where you dig the trenches, the water soon comes, for the land lies much below the level of the sea. She did not try to blink these unpleasant facts. Nay, if anything, she exaggerated them, now that they were thus arrayed before her, giving them more than their full significance. The cowardly Frenchman—the only name she had for Brisson—was armed with a weapon of her own forging. She had spent the morning, after his departure, in sharp regrets for her imprudence. In her first agony she called it something worse. Nor did she get much solace from the hastily registered vow which promised greater circumspection in all her future dealings with mankind.

But she was, after all, little more than a child, and an erring mortal besides. Only in novels is it permitted to paint the character a single colour—black or white or grey—at the outset, and to launch it upon its changeless,

immutable course through three volumes. Real life gives the lie to any such arbitrary labelling, and reiterates, day by day, that one everlasting commonplace which declares the good in men to be mingled with the evil. Our characters are kaleidoscopic, having in them the materials for every pattern—the ugliest as well as the most beautiful. Or,—and the writer claims for these tropes merely that they convey the faintest shadow of his meaning,—we resemble church organs, with pipes for every note, and notes for every melody, when it pleases favouring Circumstance to sit at the stops. This young girl must be judged by the common standard. Barely twenty, full of animal spirit, and conscious enough of her own rank to be careless of conventionalities, she had dallied with a danger which might one day plunge her into disgrace. She knew this well, that emperors are ticklish people to meddle with; that she did wrong in ever putting foot within his gates. But she was far from being the scheming woman that Brisson imagined, or the vicious one that, in his rage, he had suggested. Indeed, her mind was fresh, and healthy, and coldly pure. She was not ignorant; but she was entirely innocent, and felt merely indifferent contempt for passions which she had never known. But she appreciated Brisson's insult to the full. The very memory of it burnt the blushes into her pale proud face.

Her schemes were equally the phantoms of his brain. Her cold, disdainful nature was not incompatible with an ardent and rich imagination and an overpowering ambition, both of which may have come to her with her mother's blood. From the days of her earliest thinking childhood, it had been a habit with her to wander solitary, now beside the river Marne, now among the red chalk downs of her English home, her mind busy with the building of innumerable magnificent castles, wherein she always held the proudest place.

Passing events had their effect upon the structure. To-day, she pictured herself a famous lady doctor, bringing hope into many a home where death impended. Tomorrow, she would figure as the wife of some great premier, having, herself, no mean voice—if hidden—in the

councils of the nation. At another time her day-dream wrought the sheen of literary creation into its texture. A marvellous novel, a poem which shook men's hearts,—one or the other, and she did not much care which,—would burst with meteoric abruptness upon an astonished world: the question of the hour,—who wrote it? and the answer not long withheld.

She resembled Napoleon in this. She resembled many a better man too; for these vagrant fancies are not the exclusive monopoly of flabby wills. Most of us at times build castles in Spain; though, as a rule, they are constructed very much in outline, and are hastily demolished. "How I should like to be a great general," says one,—and then directly the guards and their music have passed by, and his bus can get on again, he straightway loses this haphazard martial ardour, and resumes his study of the money column. "What would I give to be a leading parliamentarian and the friend of royalty," says another as he gazes enviously at the right-hand box on the first tier. Behold! when he is in the very midst of a ghostly dinner-party at Marlborough House, and no less a person than his royal host has asked him what he means to do with the next Employers' Liability Bill, up goes the curtain, and all sinks into nothingness beside the troubles of some lady who does—for three acts.

With Muriel it was different. Much alone, and fonder of the open air than of books, she made these palaces often, and always elaborately; every nook and corner of them all being, so to speak, furnished; and every room inhabited.

Hence, for days she had been walking about as Empress of the French, the central figure of a dazzling court. Even this morning, since Brisson's abrupt departure, she could not banish that absorbing picture. The Marshal's disgrace and exile were, for the moment, the phantom results of her phantom greatness.

It must be confessed, however, this last dream differed from all the others that had preceded it. Those had never contemplated actual fulfilment. For one thing, they were too varied; while, moreover, most of them predicated some opportunity which never offered, or an

effort which was effectually barred by the comfort of her position. They gave her the warmth that she did not need, just as they give warmth to poorer folk who have nothing else. She recognized them to be merely exhalants, and she did not enjoy them any the less on that account. But here came a dream suggested by the chance itself. It was not in human nature to cast it boldly to one side.

The laughing side of her nature—no inconsiderable element—must also bear some portion of the blame. After all, it was a great joke, this playing tricks on his Majesty Napoleon IV, and a joke wherein only two people need take any part. Her inexperience contributed; for it caused her to overlook their relative positions. A few meetings had sufficed to show that he was her slave, or well on the road to that devout consummation; consequently she felt no reverence towards his person. As for his name, she did not give the matter a thought. She was a Mendril. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,” *and* the Mendrils. That was sufficient. If any question arose at all, it touched his eligibility rather than hers.

“I will hear you,” she said simply. “Come,” and she led the way into her small boudoir. She offered him Brisson’s chair, which still stood where the latter had left it, facing the globe and the oriel window. Godfrey shook his head. “I am a plain serving-man, and I prefer to stand.” Muriel herself moved to a position in front of the fireplace, and was now directly underneath a large engraving of her father, resplendent in the robes of his order, with the garter round his knee. It was not altogether unpremeditated, this shielding of herself beneath the ægis of “Walter, twenty-ninth Earl of Framlingham, K.G.,” and much more besides. Godfrey caught the significance. He compared the portrait with the living face, and saw in both the same haughty, high-bred air, which gave to them a likeness, though their features were entirely dissimilar.

“Before anything else,” he began, “I must convey to you Marshal Brisson’s heartfelt apologies.”

She went crimson, but did not stop him.



"He bids me express his very deepest regret, though he is well aware that he can never hope for an absolute pardon. But I abase myself on his behalf. Whatever reparation Mademoiselle suggests shall be made. So much I am authorized to promise."

"It would have been better not to have recalled this matter."

Godefroy began to think so too. But he could not now draw back. "Mademoiselle," he implored, stretching out both hands, "please hear me out. Figuratively, Marshal Brisson eats the dust in his contrition. Unless you forgive him, he declares his heart never will. Unless you forgive him, he dies. He told me so himself; and I know him of old to be a man of his word."

"I do not desire to hear his name mentioned again."

"But, Mademoiselle, won't you accept this offer?—Whenever you are in Paris, he will leave that city, as being unworthy to breathe the same air. And he will remain away until you again depart. You need but give me, say, two days' warning, and he goes within the forty-eight hours, whatever be his duties, or however great their importance."

She could not hide a faint smile. From this point of view the thing seemed so absurd.

"Possibly Mademoiselle would prefer some other atonement?" he urged with anxious eagerness. "Let the Marshal but know of it, and I am convinced it is as good as done."

"I go to Paris too seldom," she answered, still smiling, "for this to be much of a punishment."

"You cannot mean that he is to kill himself?" the valet implored. "Reflect, dear lady, the Minister is a useful public servant, as well as being the only son of his mother."

"No, no," she laughed outright; "he may live; only do not say any more about him. Don't imagine for an instant that I do not blame myself as much as I do him: I did wrong to make game of his Majesty. It was merely a foolish, schoolgirl joke."

"Am I to take it that Mademoiselle cares nothing for Napoleon's happiness?"

"I deny your right to link his name with mine," she retorted hotly. "I freely admit I have played with fire. That I have burnt my fingers, can need no admission. But at this point, Monsieur, the matter must end for good and all. I desire that you will leave me."

Brave words! decided enough in manner and in substance, but Godefroy was convinced that he could detect in them the flicker of a dying resistance. He flung his last card upon the table. Coming a single step nearer to her and the fireplace, and stretching out his hat, clasped tight in both hands, prayerfully towards her, he whispered:

"The Emperor loves you to distraction. I know it; I am his valet. Why should you not marry him? do you forget the Countess de Teba?"

"The Mendrils are far above the Montijos," came the beating of her heart. But she did not answer; and he, following up his victory now half won, poured out a passionate tale of Napoleon's love.

According to his faithful servitor, the sovereign of France neither ate, slept, nor worked. He could not be said even to live, except during the two or three hours spent at eventide beside the river in seeking after—after Mademoiselle. "And be sure of this: in the end he will marry you. I knew the under-valet to Louis Napoleon, and I declare that this young Emperor has a tenacity of purpose far greater than that ever possessed by his cousin, or indeed suspected by any one connected with him, aye, including himself. His iron will is hidden under an amiable discursiveness, especially towards ladies, which many mistake for weakness. Believe me, Mademoiselle, sooner or later he will marry you, whether you like it or not."

Then, without giving her a chance of repudiating this confident assertion, Godefroy hurried on to more vital matters. This dalliance at Meaux—he had full authority for what he was saying—meant a terrible danger to the Empire. The triple alliance hung, a much overdue thunder-cloud, over their borders. The Emperor had been deceived, in his ignorance of diplomatic ways, by the congratulations from the various embassies. He was marching daily towards the edge of the abyss.

It was at this point that the old fellow extracted the only sentence from Muriel which could in any way be construed as an assent to his scheming. And as she uttered it, her eyes shone with a curious lustre.

"I, for one, hope that we may soon have a chance of beating Prussia."

"Will Mademoiselle kindly repeat?" exclaimed Godefroy. "I am hard of hearing."

"My mother is French;" she blushed, and relapsed into her former nervous silence.

"The destinies of France," Godefroy solemnly returned, "are in Mademoiselle's keeping. In every way is Mademoiselle worthy of the Emperor. If she permits him to become her suitor, and at once, without an instant's delay, uses the great influence she will thus possess, to meet the storm which is about to burst over us, all may yet be well. If, on the contrary, she shows my master that she is a prize reserved for higher hands,"—he bowed to cover a smile,—“or if, worse still, she persists in making fun of the devotion of a noble heart, in enchaining a brain which ought to be perfectly free to guard France, then Mademoiselle, and Mademoiselle alone, must bear the blame. She will have blotted out her mother's nation from the earth."

He bowed, and half turned toward the door.

"Neither the Marshal nor I intends to remember that we have even seen you. Mademoiselle, adieu!" and he bowed once more, and this time departed. A very different exit to Brisson's. Yet of the two interviews, this one left by much the nastier taste.

He had put his suggestion with such delicate tact that it was some time before she fully grasped the depths of its enormity. This low-born valet had dared to counsel her, the daughter of almost a hundred earls, to entrap the Emperor and seal their betrothal with the sacrifice of millions of lives? The thought alone was monstrous; and, worse still, her silence had given an apparent assent to so abominable a proposition.

Such an apprehension must be immediately dispelled. She rushed to her *escritoire* and commenced a haughty impersonal disclaimer, which would have amused Gode-

froy very much. Presently she reflected that she did not know the miserable creature's name. Besides—besides, the Emperor loved her—that point no man could gainsay. And how her heart yearned for the ermine-bordered purple.

So she tore the note into many pieces. Presently she walked once more to the fireplace; and, leaning with both her elbows upon the mantelpiece, gazed long and earnestly at her reflexion in the mirror of its marble ledge.

"The Emperor loves you," said she under her breath. "You can see so much for yourself, without butlers to tell you. Why should he not marry you? There need be no plotting: go your own way quietly, and if he seeks you out, let him,—you are his equal. As for war, my father declares that Germany might any day burst across the frontier; my mother is always sighing for the 'revanche,'—there can be no harm, his knowing what they think."

Her eyes wandered to a faded cabinet group leaning against a clock that did not go. It represented the efforts of some young lady friend at Tipton; and it disclosed the family, Fersen among them, gathered on the lawn before Mendril Court.

"Oh, Nicholas," she murmured plaintively, "if only you were more determined."

## Chapter V

Godefroy went back to his pantry, certain of victory. The fates were working in his favour: on his arrival at the Villa Yvonne, he found that a telegram from the War Office had summoned Brisson to Paris,—“which will simplify matters very much,” he muttered, with a complacent smile.

It was Sunday, and the eleventh day of their stay. Even Napoleon marked the flight of time. The calendar began to worry him. That, among many other things. He turned the telltale face towards the wall; but he could not keep his mind from running on a picture of Brisson's impatience, or the reality of Godefroy's glum demeanour. So his morning went its way with all the rest; though he might have been a trifle less torpid, had he known how the two gentlemen mentioned above were spending theirs. And the valet's appearance to announce lunch, came as an agreeable diversion.

It proved also somewhat of a surprise. The man's face was wreathed with smiles. A change indeed from the thunder-clouds of the preceding week.

“Why, Godefroy!” stared his Majesty, “what in the world has come to you?”

“To me, sire?” replied Godefroy, hastily opening his arms and gazing down the front of his waistcoat.

“Yes. You are as lively as a cricket.”

“Oh, the beautiful country air always affects me.”

“It takes time.”

“His Majesty is right, it *does* take time. But it wins in the end.”

“I am glad that it has won; for we shall soon have to be gone from Paradise.

The other opened his eyes.



"Yes," continued Napoleon, not marking this exhibition of surprise. "There is a council of ministers at twelve on Wednesday, besides an interview afterwards with Brisson and the Commandant of Paris."

"But General Changarnier comes here to-morrow."

"On quite separate business. See to a train about nine Tuesday."

Godefroy bowed, and turned in silence to the Emperor's Beaune.

"His late Majesty," he said presently, dusting the mouth of the bottle, "never spent any time in the country without at least one small dinner-party. It forms little nests of partisans in various widely distant neighbourhoods."

Napoleon started. Godefroy imperturbably extracted the last speck of cork.

"And both he and the Empress always liked to have people round them. Now I could manage a small affair for to-morrow night. The Grand Chamberlain and General Changarnier will be here in the morning."

"Do as you please," drawled Napoleon; "you have forgotten the seltzer—thanks; do as you please."

Godefroy *did* as he pleased, and in consequence spent an exceedingly busy afternoon. He issued invitations to Monsieur Verre and Madame, to the Mayor and his good lady, and last, though not least, to the Earl and Countess of Framlingham, Lord Mendril, and the Lady Muriel Mendril. De Morin and Changarnier would complete the number. Prince Felix Bonaparte might possibly make a twelfth. He had already thrown his shadow before him in the shape of a post-card directed to his cousin, asking for a few days' invitation "to your charming little box, which I hear is replete with *every* convenience. My health needs change: Auteuil is relaxing, and contains no restaurants."

The following morning Napoleon took on his lawn in the enjoyment of a little unconcealed idleness. It was very peaceful out of doors; and he was all the more contented and tranquil, as he lay sunning himself, because he had definitely chosen peace. The resolve had come to him by easy stages, but it was none the less

firmly fixed. And one of his reasons for this forenoon spent *al fresco* was to rehearse the speech wherewith to communicate the decision to his ministers the following Wednesday.

"Yes," he meditated, "I shall make the statement on that day. If they do n't like it, they may go. They won't like it; Brisson will influence them, and Carache is so weak. They won't find *me* very docile. Indeed, now I come to think of it, this is a favourable opportunity to get rid of the old gang. I'll dismiss Carache, and get—get—oh, well, there are plenty of ex-premiers available. I can consult Godefroy."

The Grand Chamberlain broke in upon his reveries all too soon. The old gentleman came trotting across the lawn long before lunch-time. Napoleon noticed he looked strangely perturbed.

"Dear master," he burst out, so soon as he had gotten himself a comfortable chair, and a promising cigar from Bonaparte's box, "I have had the most surprising adventure."

"Indeed," said the other, looking at the cigar.

"The most surprising adventure," De Morin repeated. He rather fancied his powers of narration, and settled himself down to a pleasant half-hour.

"You have heard me mention the De Murinacs?" he commenced, after a decorous interval. His nephew started; and the old fellow, without waiting for a verbal answer, went gaily forward.

"And if you haven't, it does not mean that I am not continually recalling their memory. Old Gustave de Murinac was the greatest friend I ever had, besides being the noblest character the Lord ever created. We lived next door to one another in the Avenue des Villiers for many, many years. That was in the sixties, about the time when your dear father first came to seek his fortunes in Paris. All Gustave's children loved me as an uncle. There were hordes of them, I remember,—poor Paul, the eldest, and Louis, and Claire, and Victor, and Henriette, with whom my surprising adventure is concerned. You must know, Gustave, who was for a long time a great power at court, had a quarrel with your

cousin some few months before the war. He shut up his town house, and carted furniture and wife and children and underlinen to his estates in the Champagne. He and I never met again. I got news of poor Paul's death at Sedan, of Gustave's own demise a year or so later, and of his daughter Henriette's marriage about the same time. I heard that the bridegroom was a certain Lord Mendril, nothing further. And so this whole group of loved ones sank altogether out of my horizon."

The Emperor had gone hot and cold by turns during this recital. But the Chamberlain seemed so frank and straightforward, he could not doubt him. So bit by bit he recovered his composure, without, however, daring to indulge in any comments.

"To-day, in the train from Paris, I met an English milord and his young son. We got into conversation. Something about the boy's face and in his voice reminded me—of I know not what. I say to him, 'My dear young friend, have I not seen you before? I recollect your face perfectly?' He laughs. 'No, Monsieur,' he says, 'I fancy not.' 'What is your name, dear young sir?' I rejoin. He tells me Walter Mendril. It means nothing to me; for I am not then thinking of Henriette de Murinac. His father also tells me his name; he is Lord Framlingham. 'Very strange,' I mutter. At Meaux, I am waiting in the station porch for my luggage, when my attention is attracted by a beautiful lady, who keeps walking round and round me, gazing intently at me all the while. Her face also is familiar. I feel sure that she and Walter Mendril are mother and son. But why their faces should be familiar to me I cannot tell; for I am not then thinking of Henriette de Murinac."

"The whole thing is very curious," yawned Napoleon. "Uncle, you will be pleased to hear that I do not mean to fight."

"I am pleased. But, dear nephew, let me finish. The lady at last ventures to address me. 'Pardon me, Monsieur; I am sure I know your face.' 'Madame, I was about to say the same to you.' 'Pardon me, Monsieur; what is your name?' 'I am Louis de Morin,

Grand Chamberlain to his Majesty.' She gives a great shriek of joy, 'I am Henriette de Murinac.' We embrace. Her son appears at that moment. He does not look at all pleased. 'Father and Muriel are walking home by the fields,' he says curtly. His mother tells him who I am, and he unbends a little. The three of us drive out together. The dear creature tells me all her history since our last meeting in seventy. She is a great English lady now. She has three children, a girl and two boys. And she tells me that her eldest, Walter, was your bosom friend at Oxford. Is that so?"

"Yes," Napoleon assented.

"Well, what do you think of it as a strange coincidence? Just picture it in your own mind!—my word, those weary, wasted years!"

"I have never heard anything stranger," drawled his Majesty. "You understand, I do not mean to fight."

"I understand."

"I shall tell the Council so on Wednesday. You will be present."

"I am flattered by your summons." And presently De Morin trotted off to repeat his surprising adventure to Godefroy in the pantry, where perhaps he found out that it was even more curious than he originally supposed.

The second visitor, the bluff Changarnier, arrived later in the day. Napoleon really could not stand his breezy manner and bad language (both of which were assumed to hide a heart as black as ink), so he hid himself in his study until such time as it was necessary to shave and dress.

Seven o'clock found the guests assembled in the white enamelled-wood apartment which served as reception-room upon these occasions. De Morin tripped about in all directions, welcoming them with great urbanity.

"Mesdames are admiring the apartment?" said he, stealing up with pretty playfulness to where Madame Verre and the Mayor's good lady stood critically examining their surroundings, dead and alive.

"Indeed, Monsieur," replied the former of the two, "we are doing nothing of the kind. Certainly, the pur-

ple curtains harmonize well with the white panelling. The Corots, too, with their thin gold frames, are charming. But surely salmon-coloured silk is not the right material for the furniture. Besides, who in the world uses lamps? You want the electric light. Believe me, my dear Count, we do this sort of thing better in the Avenue de Marigny."

"Without doubt. Madame, however, must give us time," and he ambled gaily off to Monsieur Verre, who was examining one of the Corots in question with all the airs and graces of a connoisseur.

From the Minister, Monsieur de Morin made his way to the Mayor. That dignitary stood conversing with the Earl of Framlingham upon the topic of soup-kitchens for Meaux, a matter which, his lordship was careful to state not infrequently, the Countess had very much at heart.

"As a girl," said he, placidly solemn, "her inclinations were strongly benevolent. Her father, the late Monsieur de Murinac—as you, Monsieur, will doubtless remember—was the founder of your Paul Charity; indeed, it is named after my wife's brother, who died at Sedan. The Countess feels that similar institutions might be set up with advantage in other parts of the town. Now at home, we—ah, Monsieur de Morin, how do you do?"

His wife had already told him about their curious meeting. And as, in his heart of hearts, he did not think great beer of her belongings, he did not quite know what sort of treatment to employ to this old friend of other days. As a chance acquaintance he had not cared for the Chamberlain overmuch.

"Is my dear Henriette here?"

"Lady Framlingham is seated yonder."

"Good. And Muriel"—the kind old fellow was making up for lost time—"and Walter?"

"My daughter is here. My eldest son has unfortunately left again for Paris, but we have brought—we have brought—ah, we have brought Charles," and my lord's eye wandered uneasily to where "Charles," the sallow and debased edition of himself, sat in the company of his wife and daughter.



"Delightful," murmured De Morin; "his Majesty will be pleased to hear that you have brought dear Charles. Now I have seen the three. My word, how she resembles her grandfather. Forgive me, my lord, I must go and speak with my long-lost Henriette. To think of it! all these weary, weary years!"

But Prince Felix and Changarnier, both of whom were also discussing soup-kitchens, kept him from his pleasure.

"Come here, you old fox," grunted his Highness, as the little Chamberlain tried to steal by under the lee of the great leviathan; "come here and answer my question. How long are we to wait for Parchments?"

"Hush, your Highness, I beg—"

"Don't presume to dictate, sir," mumbled the Prince. "I am dying—perishing, I tell you, from inanition. Except for a pint of cherry brandy, I have n't touched a morsel of food since I left Auteuil. My word, Changarnier, she can make it, and no mistake. She got the receipt from her convent in Malmö. She lives in a convent, you know, when she's at home. Chamberlain, do n't try and get away. We want Parchments, and we won't let you—"

"Here is his Majesty," cried De Morin, hurrying off, as he spoke, towards the small, side door which led into Napoleon's study. It was flung open before he could reach it. He halted at once, and with closed eyes and a sublime dignity announced: "His Majesty the Emperor."

Napoleon advanced, all smiles. His ease and composure would not have disgraced a Hapsburg. Madame Verre was especially charmed. As wife of a present Minister, she followed Prince Felix, and it greatly increased her delight.

"Why not more often at the Élysée?" the Emperor genially inquired. "I shall commence to think that you have forgotten old days."

"This," the lady remarked later on to the Mayoress, "is decisive. The death sentence of the Carache-Brisson combination is signed. Verre becomes Prime Minister."

"Verre," she added, later still, and in another place, "you resign, first thing to-morrow morning."

The Countess of Framlingham followed Madame Verre. She ought to have gone before. In her turn, my lady presented Muriel. She did so in a short and perfunctory manner, verging on disrespect. Clearly, in her opinion, the girl counted for little upon these occasions. The Earl watched this scene with considerable annoyance. True, he had long given up looking for the manners of a Mendril in a De Murinac; but he did feel that twenty-six years of married life ought to have subdued some of her ladyship's brusqueries. How different Muriel. Her calmness under trying circumstances—this was the first time she had been presented to a monarch—slightly allayed his irritation. "That will do," he murmured, "if only she is like that at Buckingham Palace."

The girl's self-possession was remarkable. Her eyes met the Emperor's, and they had in them not the glimmer of a recognition. The moment which she had dreaded the whole twenty-four hours foregoing was here at last. It found her absolutely unconcerned.

On Napoleon's side the first emotion was one of disappointment. Here in the drawing-room, with her hair well brushed off her face and tightly set in unbraided coils upon her head, and in evening dress, she looked a different being to the careless schoolgirl of the riverside. The change—at least, he thought so at first—served only to make her insignificant. But this impression soon passed away. She sat silent through the whole of dinner, and before they rose the process of forging chains for his absolute enslavement was once again in full working order. It's work was nearly done.

Without daring to glance at her, except at infrequent intervals, and then only *en passant*—for monarchs seated at oval tables must walk warily—he felt her presence as a subtle essence through his frame. Her silence heightened the spell; it seemed to him that she must be marking his every utterance, watching him with wide, open eyes, which had not as yet clearly grasped the secret of his growing passion. Not that this self-con-

sciousness displayed itself either in his words or manner. He treated his neighbours with an easy condescension, which converted Madame Verre's former pleasure into very present ecstasy, while it was not without effect upon the Honourable Charles, who sat on the Emperor's left,—the Alpha and the Omega of the feast thus coming side by side—and who felt surprise to find himself visited with an unconquerable shyness in the presence of this semi-foreign potentate.

With all his brother's haughty bearing, this young fellow lacked the others handsome face. He had a sufficient likeness to his father to make him ask in what ugly mood he was begotten. Most large families, patrician as well, rejoice in such a member.

"Were you at either university?" the Emperor said, kindly, and in English.

"Oxford, sire."

"Ah, no doubt at the same college as your brother?"

"Yes, Christ Church."

"I was at Magdalen."

The young fellow murmured "Indeed," then relapsed into silence, more and more disgusted with this unwonted dumbness. He wanted to launch out upon an easy, yet brilliant, account of the university wherein he had played for four years no inconsiderable part. Alas, he could not, so Majesty very kindly started a new topic.

"Have you any profession? You are at the bar, perhaps?"

"We do not go to the bar. I am destined"—with a nervous laugh, and a not altogether pleasant look across the table at my lord—"for the diplomatic service. I should much prefer to enter Parliament. Public speaking is at low ebb just now in England; there is plenty of room. I shall, by and by, when—when—" and the lowering glance once again settled upon the ex-ambassadorial countenance.

"When?" Napoleon asked absently.

The boy mumbled something under his breath. His host continued, a curious smile flitting across his face:

"Ought you not to be at home, nursing some constituency? We do not seem far off a dissolution."

"Oh," replied Charles, dropping his voice, "those things don't affect me. Eventually — eventually —" then with a desperate dash, "I shall get the Honiton division later on. Walter is playing with it at present. Beastly mean of him, I call it; he has the title. Well, he will soon find out that the letters don't make the orator. Then comes my chance."

"Lucky young man," murmured the other. The smile still hovered about his mouth. "If I had had even the tenth part of your prospects, I should never have come to France." And this was the only chance he ever took of paying off old scores. He enjoyed it very much. He turned back to Madame Verre. She was discussing Paris with Felix. The Prince did not in the least comprehend her harangues; he usually approached the city from quite another road. Both were glad of Napoleon's intervention.

"What I want, your Majesty," cried the lady, her eyes still closed from too much Felix, "is to see the Faubourg St. Honoré straightened, even though it be at the expense of the barracks in the Rue de Penthievre. Another crying grievance, to my mind, are such dirty little streets as the Rue Boissy d'Anglas and the Rue de Richelieu. They might do for the suburbs; in a good quarter they are a disgrace!"

"Oh, I don't know," groaned Felix. "The Rue de Richelieu is a pleasant enough street. I have had many happy nights—I should say, mornings there."

"Madame forgets," Napoleon put in hastily, "that the memory of Boissy d'Anglas has an especial claim upon my family."

"No, I do not forget. Surely you will honour it more by a wide boulevard, which shall connect the Boulevard Haussman with the Place de la Concorde."

"Haussman," Felix commenced afresh, "was the curse of Paris. Many a little nook—" Napoleon heard no more. He was watching Muriel, this time without the least attempt at concealment. In taking one of his periodical surveys of the company, made that he might rest his yearning gaze for one unsatisfied second upon her face, he caught therein a look of intense agitation pass-

ing hurriedly, like a light cloud before high wind in summer-time. What could it be? He wondered greatly. Certainly no word uttered by either of her neighbours, for at the moment Godefroy was holding a dish of ice-pudding before her.

He continued to watch her, long after her face had resumed its usual calm. Madame Verre tried vainly to bring him back to Paris. Cousin Felix smiled dully at him over Madame's head, striving to interest him in Auteuil and the Swedish nation; even Charles hazarded a guttural sentence. Their well-meant seed was scattered upon rocks. He heard nothing and saw nothing, save the pale face that was searing its every line into his heart. He woke with a start, to find Godefroy wetting his ear with hot breath in an ineffectual attempt to tell him that he ought to make a move.

He recovered himself in the drawing-room, where he wandered quite unconstrained and self-possessed among his guests. He listened smilingly in turn to Monsieur Verre's hearty effusiveness, to the Mayor's drawling common sense, to the bluff Changarnier, and to the Earl's veiled condescension.

"Over in England," said the last-named, "people are talking about an Imperial visit. We have not forgotten the formerly existing friendship between your cousin and her gracious Majesty."

"Nor have I, your Lordship may be sure. And your beautiful England has other claims upon me."

"Your Majesty is personally acquainted with our royal family?"

"No. You see, Lord Framlingham, a poor lawyer living in lodgings has not much opportunity."

"Ah, yes, I forgot."

"Are you staying here for any length of time?"

"Probably till the end of October."

"I trust we shall meet again"; they bowed, and Napoleon resumed his rounds. And so he at last achieved his object, and reached Paradise by process of this semi-regal progress across the white drawing-room. Alas, he was allowed only the merest glimpse of the celestial



regions. The Countess and her daughter were together and by themselves in a remote corner. Prince Felix had just left them, and they were slowly recovering in silence. The illustrious lady—if it may be permitted to give a second description of a beautiful thing—was small and dark, with raven-black hair surmounted by a superb coronet, and a dazzling skin that showed the remainder of her jewels to perfection. Twenty-six years' daily intercourse with her noble husband had but succeeded in covering with the thinnest veneer of solemn "great ladyship" her inborn vivacity. The result was often curious. Sitting serious and still, and haughtily reserved, with now and then a solemn monosyllable in guarded accents,—lo! on a sudden, something exciting her, she would burst into a torrent of lively French, with laughter or anger (as the occasion demanded) writ large upon her face, and especially in the dark eyes, which alone, at times, showed those first signs of weariness that come from forty years upon the earth.

Napoleon put out a hand to prevent them from rising. His first words concerned Madame's health. She had been ill, he had heard.

"Only slightly," she answered, with eyes half closed and a general air of well-bred weariness.

"This is Madame's native town?"

"Almost, sire," still subdued, severely subdued.

"You must love the place."

She flung her repose to the four winds. "You are right. I suppose by now I am an Englishwoman," and she pouted prettily; "but my heart will never desert our beautiful 'Pays Mellois.'"

"And Mademoiselle, is she as enthusiastic?" He spoke with harshness, obstinately averting his gaze. And her demeanour made faithful copy.

"I am English."

"Muriel, do not be rude," snapped out Madame. "Your Majesty must forgive her; she is a child."

"I, too, have something English in me," he softly rejoined, still without looking.

Matrons, like great men, have no country. Lady

Framlingham cast a keen glance at his face. She began to think that Muriel, after all, might not be so out of place upon this occasion.

At this moment the Grand Chamberlain approached the group. He divided a low bow among the three of them, begging that he might be permitted to interrupt their charming conversation. Napoleon followed him to one side.

"It is close upon ten," he whispered, "and some of the guests have far to drive. No one can leave the room before your Majesty has withdrawn."

"Oh."

"Possibly your Majesty is on the point of retiring?"

The Emperor looked disconsolately at this smiling disturber of his pleasure. Then, turning back to re-enter Paradise, saw that the Earl of Framlingham and the Honourable Charles had anticipated him. The former nobleman was examining his watch with unconcealed solicitude.

"Ah, yes," sighed impotent Majesty, "I forgot."

He slipped away unnoticed, and sat him down beside his writing-desk, his head upon his arms, his eyes mutely reproaching the little door tunnelled through the book-case, covering the partition wall which cut him off from his beloved. He could hear the murmur of their voices. How he cursed the harsh etiquette which forced such a withdrawal on him. His frame of mind resembled that of some apprentice who listens "outside" to the silence of an unapproachable enchantress. In the same way he heard every word which Muriel did not utter; and in the same way he yearned to cross the intervening gulf. Yet he was a great Emperor, too important by far to be left behind in his own drawing-room.

A stray gust blew open the window beside his chair. The sound roused him; he crossed the threshold to the balcony. There, along to the left, the unshuttered drawing-room shed its light upon the latticed iron and the moving trees. The temptation was sore upon him to creep up and get one more sight of the face, whose picture constant calling had made it hard for him to summon.

Truly the gods were very good to him. Presently the handle of the nearest divine casement clicked, the glass doors were opened inwards, and the Honourable Charles led his sister into the cool night air.

"Ah," she murmured, giving a little sigh of relief, "this is better. The heat was quite intolerable."

"You girls," said the Honourable Charles, "seem to me to be always fainting. You make a feature of your nerves."

She was leaning against the iron balustrade. Her eyes wandered over the dim mass of swaying foliage that lay beneath them. Her thoughts were busy with something far more profitable than the Honourable Charles.

The Emperor meanwhile had withdrawn into the farther shadows. Eavesdropping was not one of his accomplishments; but he could not tear himself away.

"Rum chap, our host," resumed the Honourable Charles. "His bearing and all that are unimpeachable; but the touch of the Temple lingers about him still."

"Charles," said she coldly, "please run in and let them know where we are. The carriage may come any minute."

Chivalry was the tradition of their house. The Honourable Charles departed with a growl; while she was left alone amid the minglings of light and darkness.

It was an opportunity which no erring mortal could resist. He moved towards her; and she, without turning, felt his presence.

"Is it not shameful?" he began, taking her attitude against the railing, when about two yards distant, "to be sent to bed like a naughty little boy!"

"It is the penalty of greatness."

She was once again the unconcerned acquaintance of the river-side, treating him as carelessly as she would have done the merest companion. It was the treatment yearned for of his heart; sweet indeed did it come to him after the ceremony within.

"What have you been talking about, since I left?"

"About you and your policy."

He tried to copy her refreshing directness. "May I ask what conclusions you came to?"

"None at all."

"Perhaps you will tell me what part of my policy was under discussion."

"Foreign affairs. General Changarnier maintained that you ought to fight the Germans, while the Mayor said no."

"And the Count de Morin?" asked Napoleon, opening his eyes.

"He had left the room with Prince Felix and the Verres. Otherwise—"

"Otherwise you would not have indulged in so indiscreet a conversation."

"Exactly. General Changarnier started it. My father looked scandalized, and refused to take any part."

"I should have expected it of him. And you, Mademoiselle, what do you think about it?"

"About Changarnier's indiscretion?"

"No, about the war?" he would have dearly loved to edge a shade closer, but he dare not.

"I," she answered carelessly, "I have no opinion."

"Do you not think that peace is wiser?" he persisted.

"How beautifully the light falls upon the trees."

"Tell me. I beg you for your opinion."

"I am afraid I do not. Of course," she went on hastily, as she turned and saw the blank look of despair stealing over the Emperor's face, "I do no more than repeat what my father says."

"What does he say?"

"If you really must know,—that in your place he would not endure a peace which is merely on sufferance."

"Oh, Mademoiselle!"

"There, I hate these foolish politics. Sentiment and honour, in my view, alone should govern such questions," she said in a strangely halting voice.

"And what does honour enjoin?" he whispered.

"We English are different," with a constraint that was visibly increased.

"Pardon me."

"Well, if we had lost the two provinces, we should

not be content with the 'permanence of aspirations.' There is my father looking for me. Good-night, your Majesty." With a careless nod which increased her charm to him, and wiped away the last trace of chagrin caused by her words, she disappeared into his drawing-room, whither he might not follow.



## Chapter VI

The Board of Green Cloth at the Élysée stood in a chamber communicating, by means of a long passage, with the Emperor's library. The Council table had been newly covered since the commencement of the reign, and the whole room refurnished, but the collective wisdom of the nine or ten gentlemen therein assembled, from time to time, did not shine much brighter than in days of yore. At least, so thought De Morin, who lost no opportunity of airing this opinion; although his sneers may well have arisen from the fact that he had no part in their deliberations. To-day, however, he was to be present by the Emperor's direct summons. And he strutted through the great folding-doors which led into the room from the Minister's vestibule, a smile of intense satisfaction flickering over his pale face.

He found the full Cabinet assembled. Carache, Minister of State, advanced to meet him.

"Executive business," said the latter, bowing politely, whilst laying the merest touch of emphasis on the leading word,—“executive business, my dear Count. His Majesty will be free again at twelve, or you might even catch him now, provided your matter is not of a kind to detain him.”

“My matter, dear Monsieur,” replied the other even more sweetly, “is with the Council. I am here in accordance with the Emperor's command.”

“Then you are very welcome. Your seat will be beside Monsieur Pontécoulant yonder,” and the Premier turned once more to Brisson and the Minister of Marine, to resume the earnest colloquy interrupted by De Morin's little invasion.

Napoleon had not yet appeared, and his advisers were

still scattered in groups about the room. The Grand Chamberlain, slipping into a chair beside Pontécoulant,—who alone was seated at the table,—commenced a critical scrutiny of every one present. “There’s that fool Carache jabbering away to Brisson and Fréron. It’s quite clear he thinks war a certainty. I suppose I am the only person in the room who knows better,” reflected the old gentleman, warm all over with an immense self-satisfaction. “I wonder who is nearer the Imperial ear, I, or these blockheads with their precious ‘executive business’?” He turned to his neighbour, and inquired softly what the matters to be dealt with to-day might be.

Monsieur Pontécoulant was enveloped in official documents. He looked up at his interlocutor, and stared at him with an expression half-suspicious, half-impudent, which only served to increase the latter’s gratification.

“Well, Grand Chamberlain,” the Minister began presently, gathering up his papers to prevent prying, “who would have thought of meeting you here! This is indeed an unexpected pleasure. One looks for you in the ballrooms on the other side of the Palace.”

“And for you, Monsieur, in the correctional courts.”

“Aha,” with a boisterously good-humoured laugh, “my advocate days are over. You will have to engage a younger man, Count.”

“You mistake my meaning.”

“Perhaps, perhaps,” Pontécoulant retorted, still smiling blandly. Of a sudden, a deeply anxious look drove all the laughter from his ruddy face:

“You have n’t got a portfolio, have you?” he asked.

“Not at present.”

“You are expecting one?”

“I cannot tell you. Be satisfied with my first answer. I have not got a portfolio, and it is a thousand pities that I have not. The Emperor needs a few genuine adherents among his advisers. He is beginning to see it himself. Look round the room, my esteemed Monsieur,—you must confess that the lot of them present a most mangy appearance. Not a single one of them but has served in one or other of the Republican cabinets.”

“That hits me,” said Pontécoulant.

"Ah, with you, dear friend, the thing is different. What you do, you do from iron conviction. I have heard"—with an arch smile—"of your little *bêtise* on the night of the *coup d'état*. His Majesty values you for it. He knows how to appreciate honesty, does the Emperor. He often says: 'Pontécoulant is the only honest man among them. What he does, he does from iron conviction. As for the rest—' But you know for yourself,—why should I repeat what the Emperor says of them? They are a batch of foxy opportunists. Take Carache, for instance. He possesses a single political axiom, and he spends his days cackling it forth to a credulous universe: 'There is but one God, and Carache is his prophet; there is but one Carache, and France is his lawful prey.' How a clever man like you, Monsieur Pontécoulant, can be gulled by his petty knaveries passes my comprehension."

"Carache," began the other, lowering his mouth to a level with De Morin's ear,—“Carache is a very good servant. When I have had the lead, I have always found him an invaluable lieutenant.”

"He is a wretch," rejoined De Morin, "and his days are numbered." Monsieur Pontécoulant—he resembled a butcher somewhat—looked happy enough to hear the other use such language. He saw himself once again Premier.

At this point an usher announcing his Majesty put an end to all further conversation. The Ministers got to the table, and waited—the majority of them dozing among their papers—for one or the other of the two great men to begin.

The greatest opened. "Brisson," exclaimed Carache, "the War-Office, I understand, sees more and more reason to suspect—"

"Oh dear, oh dear," murmured Napoleon, "surely I have heard all this?"

"A circumstance—I should say circumstances of great significance," persisted Carache, "are reported from Vienna. The War-Office has quite convinced me and my colleagues that the situation is most critical."

Their words seemed like the constant "drip-drip"

of water upon a stone. Our poor friend had heard the same old story under different guises so often before, that he could not now receive it with those signs of emotion which his advisers evidently expected. Yet, from some cause or another, which he was unable to explain, these alarming reports and rumours were less distasteful than hitherto. The truth was, they fell in with the first faint inclining towards a new purpose. This is the way of love. It cannot endure to separate itself from its idol in so little a thing as a political opinion. The question of peace and war—so a sane man would imagine—is, after all, a purely mundane one, not requiring slavish imitation as part of a lover's homage.

But he made an heroic effort to be free.

"Suppose I refuse to be beguiled into war on the ground of mere rumours and conjectures? Gentlemen, what then?"

"Why, your Majesty must look for other advisers," said Carache.

"Surely this is intimidation!"

"Monsieur de Morin," shouted the Premier, "kindly keep silent."

"Monsieur Carache," returned his Majesty, "I do not permit these outbursts in my presence."

The Minister heaved a sigh of philosophic resignation. "His Majesty must pardon me; my temper overcame my respect. And at the same time he must permit me to retire into private life."

He rose mournfully from his chair, an example followed by all his colleagues, save Monsieur Pontécoulant, who dived instead under the table in order to recover a paper which had opportunely fallen to the ground. Verre went with Carache.

"Let me add this," came Brisson's mournful bass, "there is not an honest man in France who can advise peace, while professing to be anxious to preserve your crown."

"Marshal Brisson," exclaimed De Morin,—he was leaning back in his chair and smiling at the forlorn Premier,—“you have no right to say that.”

"But I do say it," blazed Don Quixote.

"My dear friend, reflect one moment. Surely you do not mean seriously to affirm that because I do not want to plunge France into the horrors of war, I am therefore a traitor to the throne?"

"I do affirm it."

"But, my beloved child—"

"Monsieur de Morin, so long as I am Prime Minister, I must ask you to hold your tongue. Your behaviour to-day has been most irregular. Well, sire?"

His Majesty was in the throes of making up his mind. The anticipated moment had arrived. How should he dismiss them?—curtly, or with comfortable assurances? He chose the latter course, and so began:

"Dear and faithful servants—" Carache dashed away a tear. Napoleon felt deeply touched; he would dismiss them by letter instead.

"Surely it is not necessary for us to come to a final decision now? We have plenty of time. I cannot part with you thus at a moment's notice."

Eight eminent gentlemen sank back into as many hardly less eminent chairs, with signs of intense relief.

"Really I cannot be expected to make up my mind at a minute's notice. I must have time to turn about in. I must see Prehlen and hear what he says," and with this outburst of petulance he swept out of the room.

Monsieur Oscar Prehlen sat in his library at No. 79 Rue de Grenelle, Boulevard St. Germain, smoking a long cigar and complacently stroking a longer beard.

The whole Embassy lay open, but he had selected this dingy back room for his private abode, in preference to the more luxurious apartment inhabited by his predecessors. And the reasons which he always gave for this curious choice did infinite credit to the goodness of his heart.

"My dear friend," he would say to you, supposing you asked him why he thus hid himself away among his attachés—"my dear friend, tell you the reason! Of course I will, and with pleasure. This modest little sanctum of mine recalls to me the memory of a room in the Carl-Johann, wherein I used to live, when I was a little, golden-



haired boy. That"—pointing to a noble view of the backs of certain houses, whose frontage looked upon the Rue de Varennes—"represents the university; while the courtyard down there stands for the dear old Eidsvold Plads. Ah me! but that was long ago, before ever I wandered forth into big, cold, cheerless Russia." Then he would heave a sigh and—for it behooves us to make the picture as lifelike as possible—flick the ash of his cigar onto the window-sill, blowing it thence lightly away, so that it might descend leisurely, a little cloud of grey dust, through streaks of sunlight, onto the burning pavement of the yard, recalling Eidsvold Plads to his tenderly retentive memory.

Others gave reasons rather less sentimental. Leave Prehlen; tap next door, and question one of those irresponsible young attachés of his—that overgrown boy, Fersen, for choice, with his angel-face and his six feet and his illimitable capacity for champagne and bad brandy at present in abeyance. He would furnish you with a very different story. He would tell you of Madame's fearful tempers; and how that life near her was a veritable hell. Then he would proceed to whisper, with sundry, deep-chested chuckles, of Monsieur Prehlen's consolation, which came by way of a certain secret spiral staircase, and which presented itself (in winter-time, at least), garbed in costly sables that had belonged to his Excellency's maternal grandmother.

But young men are so notoriously unreliable.

Besides, even if Monsieur Prehlen did indulge in a semi-platonic friendship, he performed his duties with considerable skill.

He was the most talkative, and to first appearances the most communicative, man that has ever issued forth from bowelless Muscovy. His kindness even surpassed his loquacity. Were you prince or peasant, he would fondle you and pat your shoulder and lovingly stroke your hand,—the whole process, mind, within two minutes of making your acquaintance. He would overwhelm you with an account of his family affairs, telling you about his dear, dead mother; his aunt Ottilia; his elder brother, the rascally Christiania ship-broker and ice merchant;

and his wife and her impossible temper. An especial friend might also hear a little about the Sables.

The Ambassador would next proceed to inveigh against Russia, and impress upon you how he hated the country, its institutions, and its people. That topic satisfactorily disposed of, he would wind up by discussing his ailments and vehemently damning his digestive organs. This was the process with every comer, and on all occasions.

Opposing diplomatists usually met his first advances with intense suspicion. "This fellow is exceedingly dangerous. He is trying to wheedle me." But by the time he had reached his Aunt Ottilia all suspicions were lulled to rest, and the opponent's sole feeling was one of sensitive dread lest he might take too great an advantage of so fearful and wonderful a fool.

Generally speaking, their fears proved groundless. Monsieur Prehlen knew his business. The conversational expansiveness, which never left him, was part of his *modus operandi*. And it rarely failed. He was indeed wise in despising the old school of diplomats, with their icily courteous exteriors and their not too hidden acuteness; and the new school, made up of austere young noblemen who mimicked the little tricks and graces of their predecessors,—especially those timeworn assumptions of absolute calmness under all circumstances,—but who could not see that these things were mere surplusage, and, without sagacity and knowledge of men, nothing worth.

But to return to the particular occasion on which Monsieur Prehlen sat smoking a long cigar. He was in the best of spirits. The morning had been given over to dry official correspondence; the forenoon to a still drier official reception. Here, at last, was rest after toil, and the prospect of a pleasant little evening with Mademoiselle the Consoler. He puffed away leisurely, and thought of nothing—unless, perchance, of that little dinner for two which was even now preparing in the ambassadorial kitchen.

Mademoiselle the Consoler, known to the outside world as Mademoiselle Leduc of the Vaudeville, acted up to her beautiful title. She never failed to shed an

ineffable peace over the necessarily secluded portion of the Embassy graced by her presence. In her society the soft-souled Norwegian forgot all about his violent wife. His brother, the fraudulent ice merchant, passed likewise into the realm of dreams.

Alas! there was a skeleton even at this romantic little table. Dear, cosy little feasts, which might very well have gone scatheless! Fersen's presence hovered over it. For Nicholas dealt amiably and gently with all the world. His heart lay elsewhere (as we know), but that did not hinder an engaging courtesy to such of the chief's visitors as came his way. The Sables appreciated politeness from whatever source, even upon the threshold of her wealthiest admirer. She likewise had a leaning towards personal beauty. Accordingly, she used to speak so maternally of the lad in Prehlen's presence, that his Excellency the Russian Ambassador commenced to harbour unworthy suspicions. The weakness of women was in their (self-declared) strongest link, in the eyes of this cheerful Mystic. To-day, however, the Count was safely off the premises. There would be no accidental meeting to-day. And this is partly why Monsieur Prehlen was in the best of tempers.

But even ambassadors must expect sometimes to be disappointed. A hurried step along the passage; a hurried tap at his study door—to his eager ears they seemed the heralds of approaching happiness.

Eager ears are frequently mistaken.

"An Imperial messenger," announced his Russian servant.

"The Emperor begs your Excellency's immediate attendance at the Élysée."

"Curse you, Peter," cried Monsieur, "why the devil did you say I was at home? I cannot possibly go; I won't go. Tell your master, tell the Emperor that my digestion is in a state too damnable for words. I cannot budge from this room without danger."

"Your Excellency, I was to say that the Emperor begs you not to disappoint him."

"The Emperor is at Meaux."

"He returned this morning."

"I thought he meant to remain there for another week. All my engagements are made upon that assumption. I will come to-morrow morning."

"I have to beg you to come at once."

"My dear friend," Prehlen said, laying an affectionate hand upon the servant's shoulder, "it is no use—you positively must return without me. Inform your Imperial master that I am overwhelmed with grief. But were I to venture out into the open air, my life would not be worth a second's purchase. An aged aunt, by name Ottilia Eger, an inhabitant of Arendal, depends entirely on me for her daily bread. She does n't eat bread; but you know what I mean. Drag me out to the Élysée, and you deprive her of all means of subsistence."

The lacquey, though much bewildered, was terribly urgent. He merely reiterated doggedly that the Emperor begged and begged and begged. His persistence gained the day.

"You have no bowels," cried his Excellency, at last, with an angry stamp. "May you never know what it is to have an aged aunt who depends on you for her daily bread. Return and inform his Majesty that I am coming."

When, half an hour later, the Russian Ambassador entered the Imperial presence, he found Napoleon deep in conversation with Monsieur Carache. The Premier sprang forward to greet him, seizing both his hands in a grip of frenzied affection.

"Welcome, dear colleague in the Continental system!" he cried; "thrice welcome!"

"The sea-spider grows," the new-comer replied gravely; he always commenced thus with Carache.

"The crocodile grows," our Frenchman answered. "She grows, but she will soon burst. Dear Monsieur Prehlen, we are so sorry to trouble you."

"Pray do not mention it," he politely rejoined, bowing with deep reverence to Napoleon; "it is my duty. Also, anything I can do to show my intense regard for his Majesty is pleasure enough without thanks. When I was a boy in Norway, in my dear, dead father's office—he dealt in timber and was exceedingly unfortunate,

dying some fifty thousand pounds in debt—I frequently used to spend whole nights reading about your great ancestor. What a hero! Everything connected with him, however remotely, is of priceless interest. Only last Sunday my Aunt Ottilia wrote and begged me for a lock of your hair. I replied ‘later on.’”

“We have summoned you,” Carache softly interrupted, “on very important business. The Emperor would like you to be seated.”

The Emperor himself was already in his chair. A box of pencils lay among his implements upon the desk; he commenced fidgetting with them. The Imperial pulse and brain, however, were perfectly calm. Truly, emperors are born, not made.

The Ambassador sank upon a corner of the sofa.

“The sea-spider grows,” he murmured.

“The crocodile grows. Dear friend, my master bids me make you a grave announcement.”

Prehlen stroked his beard.

“We hear from an authentic source,” the Minister pursued, “that one of the great powers is meditating war.”

“Indeed!” and for the merest fraction of a second Prehlen’s watery blue eyes rested on the Imperial face.

“War is a terrible scourge.”

“You speak truly,” Napoleon’s shaking voice broke in; “I hope to God that it may still be avoided.”

“For the present, we cannot consider that,” said Carache. “As the situation stands to-day, our opponent is determined to draw the sword. We must draw in self-defence. Monsieur Prehlen, is it not so?”

“Please do not ask me,” Prehlen cried, much agitated. “War is such a terrible scourge.”

“We must indeed,” Carache continued relentlessly. “Be sure, France and the Emperor both love peace too much to yield to aught but the strongest compulsion.”

“I know, I know,” moaned the other. “It makes my heart ache. When I first got this Embassy, my dear aunt wrote me a sweet little note of congratulation, wherein she bade me ever be a peacemaker. ‘Oscar,’ she wrote in that neat copper-plate hand of hers, ‘they



are very blessed.' And have I not always striven to obey her beautiful words? The bare thought of the desolation war leaves drains my heart of its blood."

"How true, how true."

Prehlen glanced sharply at Napoleon, then inquired of Carache in an undertone:

"I presume it will be mainly Asiatic?"

"Asiatic?"

"Yes; we really are n't in a condition to go messing about in these northern seas. You will have to do that for us."

"Really, I do not understand you."

"I thought you said that England was meditating war."

"No, Germany. I meant Germany, if I did not say it."

"Ah," rejoined Prehlen, not the least abashed, "that rather alters things. I do n't know that we have any quarrel with Germany."

"You did not talk like that, two years ago, when you helped to make the convention of Contrexeville," Carache said sharply.

"Ah, things have changed since then. His Majesty is a sign how much. As far as my own personal feelings are concerned, the Prussians are welcome to the whole of Poland, and as much of our upper western border as they care to be bothered with—than which an uglier, dirtier, more miserable country I never did see."

"Pardon, Monsieur, but the Emperor's time is valuable. What attitude will your country assume, in the event of hostilities? Can you, and will you, tell us that?"

Napoleon's teeth chattered.

"Can you, and will you, tell us that?" he echoed faintly.

"I daresay I can."

"Well?" also from trembling Majesty.

"The attitude of peacemakers I feel convinced."

Carache could scarcely stifle an exclamation of impatience. "Monsieur Prehlen need scarcely trouble to remind us of the benevolence of his government. Suppose, however, its efforts prove unavailing,—what then?"

"The thought is too terrible. Your master must permit me to telegraph. I will let you have the answer directly I receive it, say the first thing in the morning."

"We beg you to let us have it to-night."

"Could not Monsieur Prehlen send a telegram from here?" hazarded Napoleon.

"Oh, I do not think we can ask him to do that."

But the Ambassador smiled sweetly and remarked that he had n't the least objection.

"I have my cipher and my servant. I need nothing except writing materials and a quiet room."

"This way then!" cried the Premier.

"And you will let us know as quickly as possible?" hazarded Bonaparte.

"Directly I hear myself."

"Nonsense—nonsense," Carache interposed. "Take your own time."

Peter, the Muscovite valet, who sat patiently waiting in the Emperor's private hall, followed his master into the secretaries' room. The chamber was full of curtained doors and windows. Monsieur Prehlen proceeded to examine each in detail, to make sure that none of the secretaries had been left behind, either by design or accident. He jerked open the principal door, hoping that the impossible Godefroy might be surprised, with his eye glued to the keyhole,—a benignant desire which was not fulfilled. Nevertheless, he took good care to whisper his commands, standing on tiptoe that he might get his mouth level with Peter's ear, which, judging from Peter's face, was constructed by nature to receive more than it could comfortably digest.

"Return to the Embassy and get Monsieur Wadern to give you a foreign telegram—one received to-day, be careful of that. Bring it back here in exactly an hour."

Once alone, Monsieur Prehlen walked across to the secretaries' private shelf. "These will suit me," he sighed, taking out five bound volumes of *Le Charivari*. With them in his arms he sank into an easy-chair. They served to pass the time. And Peter returned to find his master buried in the contemplation of numerous delightfully questionable pictures.

Napoleon and his first minister were not so patient. The latter sat down to voluminous despatches, and pretended to be engrossed. The former, more candid, perhaps, paced up and down the room with a show of agitation which boded ill for his behaviour under greater trials.

"Carache, Carache," he said at last plaintively, "do you think they will fight on our side?"

"How can I tell?"

"I thought you might be able to give a shrewd guess. You were mixed up with the affairs of Cronstadt and Toulon and Mirecourt, is n't it so?"

"Yes, yes," Carache replies, and not too respectfully, "but that was different. We were never near war in those days."

"I hate war," cried our hero peevishly. "I don't want to go to war. Why should I? I have got everything I require. I *won't* fight. Into the next room, quick! Tell him he need n't trouble."

"Sire, be calm. And for heaven's sake modulate your voice."

"I refuse to be calm. You are all in a league to ruin me. You wish to drive me into another Sedan."

"Your Majesty is worried. There, there, we need n't talk any more about the horrid business. Our Muscovite will be back presently; do not let him see that we are perturbed."

So both men relapsed into silence; the Premier resuming his occupation, and Napoleon moving restlessly about the room, all impatience for the Russian reply. It soon came. Exactly one hour after Prehlen's departure the door opened to readmit that artless creature. He advanced, all smiles, brandishing a crumpled telegram. Napoleon slid into his chair, and set to work on papers which vied with Carache's in sternness of appearance. He looked vacantly up at his Excellency. Carache did likewise from his side.

"Ah, Monsieur Prehlen," said the latter, "pray give us a single minute. Most important despatches, you know."

"I know," cooed Prehlen, sliding into a chair; "take as long as you like."

He looked the picture of contented peace. So much of his cheeks as golden hair had not covered were tinged with a delicate pink which a woman might have envied. His eyes, though now a trifle moist, had once upon a time been blue; and eyes in a well-fed, well-clothed man are the last features to coarsen. His beard, albeit a trifle too yellow near the corners of the mouth, was truly a noble ornament, and the frequency with which he stroked it showed that he was conscious of its beauty.

He gazed genially at Napoleon's bent head. Its studious aspect did not conceal from him the fact that the Emperor was gnawing his quill and cursing his servant's procrastination. Nor was the latter's pose any more effective in deceiving so wily an antagonist.

"Forgive me," cried Carache at last, throwing down his pen with a little sigh of relief, "I had to finish this letter for his Majesty." The Premier wheeled round to face the Ambassador, and thereafter sat watching him like a tiger out for a picnic. The Norwegian's infantile expression and modesty of demeanour strengthened the illusion, giving him much the appearance of some startled antelope which feels a dread presentiment of its part in the coming feast.

"Before anything else, sire," Prehlen returned, "may I make one last appeal? I beseech you sheath the half-drawn sword."

"Impossible!" said Carache.

"No, it is not impossible," muttered Napoleon. "The sword, as you say, is only half drawn. I am not sure that it will come out any farther."

"Ah," said Prehlen.

"Not at all sure. But there was no harm our putting the question to you, was there? Your answer may help to decide us—me."

"Oh!" again from Prehlen.

"What does your government say?" Carache asked.

"We propose to put ourselves on a war footing at the very outset of hostilities."

"Yes," eagerly.

"You may be sure that in doing this," dawdled the

Ambassador, "we shall not have far to go. We are pretty near a war footing now."

"Pray go on."

"Navy and army, remember, will be placed on a war footing. Naturally, we shall need subsidies."

"You shall have them; you may take his Majesty's word for it. Go on."

"Being on a war footing, and receiving your subsidies,—loans, you know,—we shall observe the strictest neutrality."

He stopped dead short and smiled benignly at his fellow-negotiators.

The Emperor drooped his shoulders in utter prostration. Monsieur Carache cried "Pah!" his favourite expletive.

"The strictest neutrality." Prehlen repeated, lingering unctuously over this part of his communication. "If you conquer, as you no doubt will, we shall look to participate in your good fortune. We should regard such a share in the light of compensation."

"Compensation! What in heaven's name for?" hotly from Carache.

"For not siding with your enemies."

"Pish! I am quite sure you are joking."

"Oh, dear, no. I am giving you my government's instructions word for word."

"You must specify your share."

"We can do that later on. It would look too greedy just at present."

"There will probably be no war."

"That is as your Majesty pleases."

"And if we are beaten?" asked Carache.

"Need we talk of that?" purred Prehlen.

"Certainly, we need."

Prehlen turned and gazed at Napoleon in deep commiseration. The moisture in his eyes increased. Two "erring pearls" quivered over the nose-corners of his lower lids, hung there a while for re-enforcements, and then rolled gently down his tinted cheeks.

"Majesty," he gulped, "may heaven avert defeat!"

"Oh!" burst out Napoleon, himself much affected,



"you know I have not finally made up my mind to war."

"Don't; take my advice, and don't!"

"Honestly, I do not think I shall."

"If we are beaten?" persisted Carache.

"I can't bear to hear you," Prehlen answered. He endeavoured to make his lips quiver, forgetting that they were hidden beneath heavy hair, and that, accordingly, success in such an undertaking could not be counted unto him for righteousness. It took him some time to master his emotion. But, like the brave man he was, when he did speak again, it was in a manner altogether business-like and self-possessed.

"We shall stand at attention. His Majesty will only have to send us word that the Germans have penetrated one yard west of a line drawn between Thionville and Belfort, and we shall be *en route* for Berlin."

"In fact a defensive alliance."

"Exactly."

Napoleon heaved a sigh of relief. "Your words, Monsieur, have removed a weight from my mind. I thank you for them."

"You fill me with pride."

"Monsieur may well be proud. He has bound two great nations together. Come adversity—"

"Which God forbid," cooed Prehlen.

"Russia and France will stand shoulder to shoulder; if success—"

"They will share like brothers," grinned Carache.

"What about the preliminaries?" asked Prehlen drawing out a note-book.

"We can leave those till the morning," answered Carache.

"Mind, even when we have signed them," Napoleon made haste to say, "we do not bind ourselves to fight."

"Of course not."

"I must have time to think the whole matter over quietly. I have n't been on the throne above a month; it is preposterous to expect me to decide so momentous a question in so short a time."

"I thoroughly understand. Very well, Monsieur

Carache, to-morrow morning. Sire, permit me to offer you the assurances of my most devoted respect. Monsieur, adieu," and in the hall his sharp ears caught these words, spoken by Napoleon, "Carache, Carache, I wonder whether we have made a judicious bargain?"

## Chapter VII

His Excellency the Russian Ambassador was troubled by no such sinister reflexions. He returned home to the Rue de Grenelle, feeling that his country might well congratulate itself on the possession of so clever a public servant. And his satisfaction increased tenfold when he discovered what the kind gods had prepared for him in his little room, to wit, Mademoiselle the Consoler, more beautiful than ever, and ravishingly dressed. Like a wise ambassador who must have lighter moments, he suffered her to partake of his good humour without sharing in his good news. And when she had departed, and the moon in its turn had done the same, he mumbled some perfunctory prayers—for much the same reasons that induced mediæval men to wear bits of dried frog and necklets of strung teeth—and slipped into bed, well pleased with his afternoon's work. He would write to Aunt Ottilia in the morning; this would gratify her more than a dozen locks of hair from the Imperial brow.

Three days later, and at twilight, Monsieur stood in his wife's boudoir buttoning white kid gloves, and smiling at the reflexion of his pink complexion and yellow beard. Madame was more than usually unpunctual, and they were due at the table of a hostess who counted that virtue high. But no shade of vexation crossed Prehlen's contemplative face. He was a man who deserved happiness, for he made good use of it when it came. He chewed the cud of some past piece of fortune for days on end, and the whole Embassy, save such part of it as was dedicated to Madame, shared in his high spirits. On this occasion, it is true, he had grave doubts about the intrinsic merits of the treaty. But the first duty of Russian servants is to obey instructions. He had done so

to the letter, and if the home authorities chose to change their tactics at the eleventh hour, when possibly it might be too late, that was no concern of his.

So the Ambassador smiled at himself affably, and hummed an air, and patted his beard and his orders, and waited in patience for Madame.

There came the sound of hurrying feet along the passage. Next minute the door burst open.

"Ah, Fersen, it is you?" said Monsieur; he still surveyed himself in the chimney-glass.

The lad's face was flushed with excitement. He brandished a much-mangled *Soir*.

"Look here!" he shouted, "Excellency, what do you think of this?"

"My child, pray be calm. You will burst an important blood-vessel. What shall I say to your mother, then?"

"Read this!" was the only answer.

Prehlen wheeled round slowly. He extracted a small, gold toothpick from his fob-pocket, examined it minutely for several seconds, then commenced exploring his false teeth.

"I never read without my glasses," he drawled out. "Do you read it to me."

The attaché obeyed, reciting the three or four pregnant lines in an uneven voice, which enhanced their significance. It was the usual "authorized account." If it could be believed, war had been declared against Germany at half-past three that same afternoon.

At dinner the table rang with this thunderbolt. Monsieur Prehlen alone steadily ignored the one absorbing topic. He sighed a little now and again when he bethought him what a terrible scourge war was, but for the most part he busied himself with such light conversation as he could get, and the pleasures of the table.

At six o'clock on Wednesday evening, Carache took his final decision. He spent until half-past nine trying to convince his master. He merely succeeded in leaving the last-named potentate prostrate on his sofa, in the attitude of a defunct jelly-fish, and faltering upon the

brink of idle tears. Next morning the Premier returned to the attack, without avail,—suffice to say that at six o'clock, two days later, war was declared. The seventy hours or so intervening were full of military preparations and feverish diplomacy; the former intensified because concealed, the latter embittered by its very hopelessness.

But it would take an abler pen than the one now striving to piece out these stray pages to describe those movements of great armies, or the thunder of shrieking trains which tore towards the frontier from all corners of both empires, or the tears and prayers which rose like some thick vapour, and rolled in dwindling masses against the pitiless heaven.

Another pen, too, must describe the virtuous indignation at Berlin, when out of a clear sky there fell a document unpleasantly like an ultimatum, desiring to know the meaning of that military restlessness along the western frontier. As the Imperial Chancellor plaintively exclaimed to one of his subordinates, he was not aware of any especial military restlessness along the western frontier; in his opinion, that frontier was particularly quiet, considering the number of troops massed thereon.

He was old and sagacious, and knew the meaning of war.

But the young blood about the Council table was ready enough to use the pretext in the spirit it was given. The federal princes, not to mention the numerous scions of their houses, were mostly callow and ardent. They were also a trifle weary of chanting the praises of their fathers, the "Empire founders," and were anxious to show that they could defend what the want of opportunity alone had prevented them from winning. The same spirit pervaded the army, though in a lesser degree, as was to be looked for in men of thinner blood. Count Rumpenheim, especially, who commanded in chief, had long ago come to hate those frequent pilgrimages to the shrine of the great strategist, which—as his enemies declared—were the only things the latter had left him. Accordingly, defiance met defiance. The telegraph wires, those bearers of modern-day gages clicked out their miserable task, with the result already



known. The details of this final rupture are full of interest. But they should be looked for in serious histories, not in a petty domestic chronicle, which can essay such minor matters as the vagaries of the human soul, or eternity, but which must once and for all crave permission to leave the higher politics severely alone.

A curious feature of these curious days was the apathy with which the news was received in both countries. The actual troops, and the reservists behind them, were naturally filled with martial ardour, and they communicated it to their relatives in diluted doses. A delicious little flutter, too, went through the independent classes; those lucky people who live on unearned increment, and who can breakfast at twelve, and spend as long as they like over the morning paper. These got out their maps of eastern France and western Germany, and purchased compasses and whole hogsheads of pins. Their wives and daughters, at the same time, commenced to pluck lint and chop up the lids of wooden wine-boxes. One or two bourses had feverish days, and not a few "operators" had feverish nights. Army contractors, from the makers of ordnance to the purveyors of adulterated groceries, also became excited,—cheerfully excited, these; and full of prayer that the single flame might result in a general conflagration. The British ship-owner shared in their rejoicing, hastening to collect his craft from all waters,—at the cost, it is true, of many a broken charter-party, and the consequent innocent delight of those middle-aged gentlemen who charm the Queen's Bench and the Admiralty Divisions with their eloquence—in the hope of French expeditions to the Elbe and German reprisals on the lower Seine. One patriotic merchant went so far as to offer his own Admiralty the use of his line of China tea-ships, though with what precise object, this offer did not proceed to specify.

But these were the limits of excitement.

In Paris and Berlin, and in the other large towns of either country, men went to and fro with the same light-hearted indifference, or the same apathetic misery, as had marked them prior to the happening of this great event. There was no gathering in excited clusters along

the boulevards or Unter den Linden; there were no huge crowds thronging round abducted prima donnas, and clamouring for songs of war. In truth, a bitterness which war seemed—but these are still high politics!

The indifference of the streets found no counterpart within the palace. Interviews, councils of war and state, despatches from every town in France, had followed each upon each with breathless rapidity. So much so indeed, that now, towards the evening of his last day in Paris, the Emperor seemed to have reached the end of all preparations, with nothing left to do but start forthwith for the eastern frontier.

Appearances may have been deceptive. Likely as not there were generals and officials innumerable still to be interrogated, and many important despatches yet to be written. Certainly, hundreds were thronging his ante-chambers, all waiting and praying for interviews, on which—in their several estimations, at least—hung the whole chance of the war. Be this as it may, Napoleon's attitude was one of restless idleness, which could hardly endure even to contemplate the twelve hours that must elapse before his departure.

He had always been high-strung. From his earliest youth, the least thing had sufficed to unhinge him and rob him of his sleep or powers of application. And for this reason—because he had never been able to attain to calm under petty cares and worries—he imagined that his nature must contain vast reserves of stoicism, which it only needed heroic circumstances to summon to the surface. He “imagined”; for he imagined so still, while he wandered restlessly about his library, turning from every attempted occupation with equal impatience. At last he relinquished the struggle, though not the faith. Taking his stand by a corner window, he commenced to tap listlessly upon the glass.

His brain whirled under the memory of the incidents of the last few days. Especially was he haunted by the recollection of that first interview with the German ambassador on the Thursday evening preceding, in this very room. He could not forget the deepening gravity of the latter's pleasant face, which, for the one brief

second after he had grasped the full bearing of the Emperor's words, had been positively distorted by rage and disappointment. The blow was so sudden, and peace had been his pride. To be sure, the look was only momentary, and at once gave way to a frigidly-polite demeanour, preserved to the end of the interview; but Napoleon could not blot out the ugly picture of this man standing like some wild beast at bay. Then there were those "soundings" of other powers, with more or less equivocal results; and those furious articles in the *Times*, which galled and disquieted him at one and the same moment. No, these meditations were anything but pleasant; and it would have been well for him had he been able to throw them aside and bury himself in some book which contained no single reference to the Continental system, historical or geographical.

The Grand Chamberlain broke in upon his listlessness. The old wretch's business proved of the most trifling character. First of all, he delivered a message from Felix, to the effect that his Highness would be delighted to act as regent during the continuance of the war. Napoleon brushed the impertinence contemptuously away.

"Carache has his instructions."

Secondly, De Morin asked a place among the pages for Paul de Murinac, the grandson of his dear old friend. Napoleon brushed *that* aside, but without comment. So De Morin took the thing as agreed and made a note of it.

Lastly, the old gentleman informed his nephew that the custom obtained to set aside certain of the smaller residences as homes for the wounded and convalescent. On this point he sought no instructions.

Then he embraced his kinsman, "in case we never meet again," and gave him a time-table showing the best connexions with Belgium, and so ambled away. But his intrusion had set the stream of visitors and despatches going once more. Every one and everything was urgent, refusing to take any denial. The butler quite collapsed under the strain, and was eventually compelled to depute his duties to other hands. All things, however, must end in time. By eleven the palace

was silent. Napoleon left his laden desk, and walked across the passage to trifle with his dinner.

The clock struck midnight before he returned. He glanced with genuine dismay at the work that remained still to be completed. He flung himself in an arm-chair. With vacant eyes fixed upon the chandelier, he surveyed his circumstances with equally vacant brain.

The war was none of his seeking; and, try as he would, he could not summon any enthusiasm for it. He felt regretfully—though also in the most apathetic manner imaginable—that it was far too soon to hazard all the pomps and pleasures of his great position. The power, such as it was, that he enjoyed, the respect which he received, the luxury wherein he lived, all were very dear to him; while he reflected with some bitterness that none of those more especially sweet sensations, so confidently looked for at the outset of his reign, had as yet been vouchsafed to him by the otherwise complacent gods. Not one of the friends of his earlier days had visited him, or given him a chance of displaying for their admiration his perfectly natural and modest demeanour. His former enemies—mostly those who he had *imagined* disliked him—showed themselves equally shy and unintrusive; and the biting scorn which he had rehearsed for more than one who in the past had been guilty of some real or fancied lightness towards his hidden Highness, remained, alas, nothing but an ardent dream.

The great one, too, of that now faded horizon, whom he had most envied, to wit, the Lord High Chancellor of England, went on witnessing any number of summonses which reeked of Bell Yard and bad beer, but never would adventure himself across the straits that he might behold the dazzling elevation of an obscure member of his own profession. The judges, those lesser luminaries, who—to his fevered brain—had been wont to cast many a pitying glance at his sodden brieflessness, stayed severely away, preferring Norwegian fiords and Scottish mountains to the courtly patronage which awaited them at the Palace of the Élysée. The English Home Secretary (another of his worries in bygone days) seemed satisfied with the contemplation of his own magnificence.

Accordingly, our hero had to content himself with the actual reverence and envy meted out to him by his own subjects. There was plenty of it, and it came very sweetly to his bourgeois soul, as did the heavy robe of purple and ermine which hung around him on state occasions. For the rest, he was forced to believe that among his old friends and enemies he formed the one engrossing theme of conversation.

Another grievance lay in this: the labour expended on the conduct of affairs seemed likely to be altogether wasted. What profit that he rose at five—a habit engendered by the example of other monarchs—and toiled sometimes till midnight? What profit indeed to pore over plans for a bridge for Vienne or a breakwater for Briec, if, before ever those works were completed, he should find himself a nameless fugitive, with the breakwater and bridge left behind him to embellish the epoch of the fourth Republic? Ah, no profit at all; and these hours would be just as much wasted as those had been which he had spent sitting briefless in his desolate chambers.

Muriel ended the procession. And well she might. Her word had done its little part towards the war. She, more than many, had finally decided him. He could admit as much, communing thus with his own heart and in his chamber. He began to see the face he loved; and beginning, pined for Meaux.

But he pushed this last phantom vigorously aside. He still was able. And he reverted to those less disturbing ruminations over royal splendour so soon to pass away.

So he sank back into discontented dreams: and presently Godefroy crept in on tiptoe and turned out the lamps which stood about his master's table, as well as the gas-jets, save one, which he left, a glimmering star to illumine the surrounding waste. On his way back to the door, the servant passed close to Napoleon's chair.

"The poor little one," said he softly, his hand for a brief instant upon the other's shoulder, "the poor little one. He will sink under the burden like all the rest,"



and he glided out, leaving the shadows to surround and swallow the sleeping form.

When Bonaparte awoke, it was to feel the sun about his brow. He rose as though he had never been asleep, and followed its rays onto the balcony. He found the calm of early morning. Even yet, the walls around him moved from violet to purple. The light air, not yet discoloured by smoke or summer haze, fanned him, fevered as the night had made him. He drank it in longingly.

The faint sound of music reached his ear. It grew—as the dawn had grown—it swelled into a stirring march. “Troops bound for the war!” he muttered, his gloom returning. They proved the Eightieth of the line, a regiment lately garrisoned at Orleans. Neither the bandsmen nor the foremost companies noticed the dumpy figure. But a young subaltern, recalling, no doubt, some wistful face left behind, looked skyward to crease out his tears, and thus caught sight of Majesty. He recognized him at once. “Vive L’Empereur!” he cried, saluting smartly with his sword. Napoleon waved back an acknowledgment. All took up the cry. A shout of triumph went to heaven and the balcony. Bonaparte felt a strange joy at his heart. And when, in the midst of a lull, a pert recruit from the Loire bawled out “Au revoir à Sedan, Monsieur,” the Emperor bawled back the more dangerous memory, “À Berlin.”

## Chapter VIII

Half-way up a certain valley of the Moselle lies the little town of Pont-à-Mousson, beautifully placed amid rolling hills, and almost in a straight line between Metz and Paris.

Its ordinary atmosphere is deep calm, notwithstanding the fact that a stiff walk five miles eastward will bring a man out onto the frontier. The two countries have marched in peace for nigh thirty years; and even now, on this August afternoon, with a crowned Bonaparte hurrying thither from the capital, the spot was wrapped in sunlit stillness which gave no sign of those huge armies scattered about the border from Montmédy to Belfort. The streets were empty. Not a dog stirred along the heated pavements. Such wayfarers as were abroad kept to the shelter of the arcades. One or two loafers sprawled about the cafés; and a party of merry children sat devouring ices round a table at the principal confectioner's.

Pont-à-Mousson, be it said, is not a town of much importance. The guide-book will tell you about its Place Duroc, or its Maison des Septs Péchés Capitaux; but to Napoleon it had a significance of a different kind. As he came upon it from Frouard, and caught a first glimpse of its outstanding houses, he felt convinced that the placid-looking city was to be the name-place of yet another tragedy. Its beauty afforded him no refreshment, though he saw it after the dust and fatigue of a seven-hours' journey. Rather the contrary!—He regarded it at best as a jewel about to be plucked from the Imperial crown. He could feel no sort of confidence in little General Mesnil, who went composedly forward, twiddling his thumbs, blinking his little ferret eyes, and

deftly manipulating a game, the very rudiments of which were a sealed book to his master.

The journey from Paris had not been a triumphal progress. Majesty had only met with a qualified reception along the route; he was consequently very glum and silent. The commander-in-chief—the only other occupant of the Imperial carriage—did not suffer himself to be infected. He prattled away with delightful innocence. He pointed out the various objects of beauty to be seen from the carriage windows, though he took care not to refer to their strategical significance. Indeed, he avoided “shop” of any sort; while his appearance hardly betokened a great general about to guide the movements of over two million men. His uniform was shabby and ill-fitting. He had discarded his képi, such as it was, at the outset of the journey, and his head was now swathed in a skull-cap of palatial dimensions. His hand-packages filled both racks. He had dragged them into the carriage, under the pretext that they contained maps. Towards mid-day, however, he had gone to them for quite other kind of nutriment. Every bag and box had furnished its quota, whether of brandy or sandwiches or fruit, towards his lunch. To crown all, he kept up a thin trickle of conversation throughout the entire journey; that is, except when he was eating, and even then he tried hard to combine his gulps with easy demonstration. Not that he really demonstrated. He chatted about everything save business. Now and again the Emperor strove to decoy him into the strategic value of some hill or valley or river alongside of which they might happen to be passing. He could always avoid an answer, diverging instead into another topic all-engrossing, such as the inner arrangements of one of his beef sandwiches.

“This is Frouard!” he burst out, when they were approaching that town; “one changes here for Nancy. Now,” he shouted a few minutes later, “we enter the valley of the Moselle! that is the Moselle.” So he went on, and so he had gone on, in an even more incessant strain, from their first minute together. Small wonder then that Napoleon hailed the distinguishable “clank” of the carriages which heralded the journey’s end.

Mesnil jumped briskly onto the cushioned seat to collect his hand-things. "I trust very much," he exclaimed, in the intervals of getting an unwieldy bag onto the floor,—“I trust very much that there will be porters at Pont-à-Mousson.” He dashed to the window, and, craning his head forward, endeavoured to catch a glimpse of the station platform. He drew it in with a sigh of relief. “Yes,” he murmured, “I see some.”

There were, besides, half a dozen general officers, a brace of mayors, three prefects, and most of the leading citizens. Napoleon had to listen to a patriotic welcome, which was drawn up, moreover, upon the assumption that General Mesnil, “but yesterday the obscure commandant of a garrison town, to-day the director, under his Majesty, of the entire army,” would be stationed in a modest attitude on the Imperial right hand. As a matter of fact, the director of the entire army was far more profitably employed. He had gone off to have a look at his luggage; and although the station-master assured him that the van would go on entire to Pagny, he insisted upon breaking bulk, and carrying off a little square wooden case, asserting roundly that it contained plans priceless beyond the dreams of avarice. “I mean to keep it henceforth by me,” he said emphatically. This small matter unfortunately diverted him from his bags and hat-boxes. As a result, over-zealous officials carried them to the carts outside. Breathless with agitation, he flew up and down the platform, asking of all men whether they had noticed any goods marked “M.” Before long he reached the group round the Emperor. General Changarnier prevented him with the greatest difficulty from rushing up to the Mayor and inquiring what the devil that potentate had done with his belongings.

“General Mesnil,” said Napoleon, when they were once more alone, in one of the larger sitting-rooms of the hotel, “you and I must have a little talk about business.”

“By all means, sire,” the other replied; but he made no attempt to seat himself, although the Emperor motioned him to a chair already drawn up to the table. He

was standing by the doorway, buttoning on white kid gloves, and he had changed his uniform for a brighter and a newer one. "By all means, sire," he repeated in the most accommodating manner, but he still went on buttoning his gloves, and edged one step nearer the door with every fresh button achieved.

"Won't you sit down?" the Emperor asked.

"No, no, your Majesty must rest. You look pale and fatigued."

A spasm shot across the young man's heart—not a real one, but a fancied one, which was very nasty all the same. This always happened whenever any one criticised his physical appearance.

"O, I feel well enough," he said nervously.

Mesnil pursued his advantage. "Your looks, then, belie you. Two or three times in the train this afternoon I thought you were on the point of fainting."

"I assure you I feel quite well. Oblige me by doing what I ask."

"To tell you the truth, I desire to do a little shopping. I positively must purchase some soap and a sponge-bag."

Napoleon could not stifle a groan of impatience. "Cannot your servant do these things for you?"

"He is at Pagny with my trunk."

"You are trying to make me ridiculous," cried the Emperor, lashing himself into a sudden fury. "You *must* stay and—and—have a short consultation with me. I insist upon it. The soap must wait."

Mesnil bowed, and advanced a few steps into the room."

"Be seated, if you please," curtly.

Mesnil bowed again and sank into the chair. But his képi lay to his hand, while he made no attempt to remove his gloves, though it was easy to see that these elegant garments helped to fan the flame. He was perfectly respectful. His little twinkling eyes gazed into Napoleon's with absolute calm; and the fussy, trifling demeanour, which was his usual one, had departed, and left him a quiet, somewhat ordinary, little gentleman, with clean-shaven and wrinkled face, no hair to speak of, four foot and a third of height, and a gorgeous uniform.



Napoleon cast about him for a fit beginning; it was a painful process.

"I have fixed ten o'clock in the morning for a council of war," said he at last, and he marvelled at the thinness of his voice. "It will take place at Pagny, I need hardly say."

"I sincerely trust that your Majesty will countermand that order."

"Why?"

"Because I cannot consent to discuss my plans with any one save yourself."

"Suppose I command?"

"Then you must find another Chief of the Staff."

"Your words amount to a threat!" the Emperor cried with great vehemence.

"His Majesty must place whatever construction upon them he desires."

There ensued an uncomfortable interval of silence. The Emperor broke it; and his voice was a shade softer.

"General, you are a little premature. I have not said that the council was to criticise your plans. What if it is merely to take your orders?"

"Not the least difference. I should prefer to give them my orders separately."

"Very well, have it your own way," and Napoleon laughed nervously, while a look of miserable doubt passed across his face. It was a look which said very plainly, "I do n't know whether or no I am playing the part of a great commander, or whether I shall be suffered to enter upon that rôle at any future time in this business; but I have never had an opportunity of learning strategy, and that is my misfortune."

"You, sire, will have all the glory."

"Really, my dear Chief, you seem very certain of victory. Furthermore,"—and he assumed a look of intense sternness—"each of us will get what honour he deserves."

But sternness was of no avail. Mesnil merely gazed serenely back. So Napoleon dropped his frown, seeking comfort in a survey of his finger-nails. It was very curious, all this, and quite unlike his preconceived notions

concerning the reticence and general correctness certain to mark the behaviour of a great monarch and his first lieutenant. He supposed Mesnil knew more about these matters than himself; but to his mind the transactions so far resembled nothing so much as company-promoting.

"I have still another request to make of your Majesty."

"Well?"

"May I be excused from discussing my plans even with you?"

"But—"

"At all events till to-morrow morning. I am expecting important despatches from Epinal: they should be here every minute: and then—"

With dramatic suddenness there came a tap at the door.

"A telegram from Epinal for his Majesty's Chief of the Staff."

Napoleon took the despatches and handed them on to Mesnil.

And then—?" said he.

"And then I shall beg for a few hours in which to consider them," and he gently lifted his képi from the table.

"I suppose you must have your way," sighed Napoleon.

Mesnil rose, bowed, and passed on tip-toe out of the room. He sought his own apartment, which was directly above the Emperor's, and full as pleasant, having been fitted up by mine host, with a view to expediting his meditations. The General deposited the unopened telegram upon the green-cloth card-table, which the landlord had imported thither, because—as he had told his wife—it reminded him of the Congress of Berlin. He then proceeded to have a draught of water. Next, he consulted the looking-glass, and smoothed down the wispy hair which, to his practiced eye, had evidently got ruffled in the late encounter. These duties done with intense deliberation, he turned to the news from Epinal. He took it up languidly, seating himself on the pillow of his bed, and read it through twice with the utmost calm-

ness. It was from General Clisserole. It was evidently what he wanted, so he went out for another little promenade.

The Hôtel de France next morning was early astir. The thunder of cannon, though faint and intermittent, had yet been heard distinctly all through the night. Towards dawn the ominous noise seemed to come closer, and those who were awake and watching felt it their duty to arouse the Emperor.

It was an easy task. Major Gorin,—Bonvalet's Gorin,—the officer of the guard, did not need knock twice at the door of the outer bedroom where Godefroy lay garbed in his trousers and semi-military ulster. The unhappy butler had passed hours listening to the first low mutterings of the storm. His head was throbbing with fatigue. Gorin's unimpassioned summons came upon him at the moment he first lost consciousness. It sounded like a pistol-shot.

He started up quivering.

"Who is there?" he shouted in tremulous voice. "If it's the Prussians, I sha'n't open."

Gorin, his mind busy elsewhere, suffered himself to be betrayed into a burst of laughter. He stifled this indecorous mirth, but only succeeded in rendering its sound the more coarse and brutal. Godefroy shivered.

"I know who you are," he murmured, prostrate, "you are the Emperor William. Go away! I am surprised at your want of tact."

Napoleon, from his inner chamber, could hear every word. He, too, reclined, half-dressed and in a feverish doze, ready for any emergency. Springing to the floor, he hurried through and admitted Gorin. The officer quickly imparted the cause.

"Have you awakened General Mesnil?" he asked, before anything else.

"No, sire."

Napoleon was visibly relieved. "You did well, Major Gorin, to come first to me. Perhaps you had better wake him, though. Tell him I await him in my sitting-room."

The sound of cannon still continued, but at longer

intervals. It wrung Napoleon's heart. Each reverberation seemed fraught with carnage. His was the guilty hand; he felt that it was stained with blood.

If only he had obeyed the promptings of his conscience!

He returned to snatch up coat and sword, and, completing his toilet as he ran, fled down the stairs. The sitting-room smelt sickly and unwholesome, but he had not leisure to open windows. He strode up and down, up and down, waiting angrily for Mesnil, and every now and then hearing that terrible sound of cannon which echoed through his brain. The morning air began to chill his bones. The dawn delayed unconscionably. So did the General. Napoleon waited five minutes, and then set off in person to rouse the sluggard.

Major Gorin had got no farther than Mesnil's unopened door.

"I have knocked a dozen times," he told his master. "I believe he has barricaded himself in with a chest of drawers."

At that moment the answer came.

"What the devil do you want?"

The Major informed him that it was his Majesty's commands that he should be roused. There had been a heavy cannonade all through the night, from the south-east. Though now slackening, it was also coming closer.

"From the southeast?" the Chief of the Staff inquired.

"From the southeast," the Major replied. A brief silence ensued. They could hear the General fumbling with his pillow: presently what sounded like a china candlestick fell with a crash to the floor. Then followed the crackling of stiff paper.

"From beyond Nancy, I suppose?" he said at last.

The Major imagined so.

"It is quite clear," Mesnil said emphatically. "That blasted fool Bréheville has been trying to hold the line of the Vezouse. Telegraph him at once to Lunéville, and bid him keep to the Meurthe, as I ordered."

Gorin bowed to the door-handle. "Very good, General. Shall I also wire to Marainvillers? General Bréheville may be absent from Lunéville."

"He won't be at Marainvillers—that is, unless the Germans have got him," and a grim chuckle floated across the barricades.

Gorin turned away. "Hi!" shouted the Chief after him, "come back. Send a telegram also to Clisserole at Epinal. Tell him, if he does n't keep Bréheville in order, I'll invite his Majesty to chop off both their heads, when we get 'em back to town. They've both got their orders, let them follow them." The General swathed his head in the bedclothes. "I cannot add more," said he, his voice much muffled. "If his Majesty has risen, tell him to go to bed again." Had the two men tarried there five minutes longer they would have heard faint sounds of snoring,—irregular indeed,—but replete with comfort and suggestive of perfect peace.

Four hours later, joy and exquisite sunshine filled the streets of Pagny-sur-Moselle. The Emperor had just arrived, and was on his way to Imperial headquarters, La Grange-en-Haye, a small farmhouse perched among the gentle hills behind the town. Majesty received quite an ovation along the route. It did n't comfort him much. A man cannot be very cheerful after being roused at five to listen to cannon.

Mesnil jogged along some two horses'-lengths behind his master. The dashing Changarnier rode beside him.

"What keeps you so silent, Mesnil?" the latter asked, a look of anxiety passing across his bloated face.

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"Surely you would not have me sing? If you must know, I am wondering what brings Mademoiselle Leduc here." He nodded in the direction of a balcony just above them on their left. It was shaded with a pink and white striped awning, while beautiful flowers peeped out from among the carnation-coloured railings, and formed a suitable bower for so much loveliness. Changarnier rapped out a horrible oath, without, however, varying the genial smile which shone forth from his blood-stained eyes.

"That blasted Prehlen is up to some of his tricks. If it had not been for him, and for—for—we should have had the Russians fighting with us in this business."



"Who knows?"

"I do. Carache mismanaged the business badly, damn him. And of course the—of course there is no one to keep the blasted fool in hand," and Changarnier glared at the bent figure in front of them. The next minute his blood-red visage was wreathed in smiles. "General, his Majesty is beckoning you."

"There will be news from Lunéville over at the camp?" the Emperor commenced, as soon as Mesnil was abreast.

"Yes, bad news."

"Thanks, that is all I desired to know." Mesnil bowed and fell back. Napoleon resumed his look of studied calm. For a short time he made no change in the easy trot at which they were proceeding. By and by he set spurs to his horse, and three minutes later the whole cavalcade was sweeping along in a cloud of dust towards the farmhouse of La Grange-en-Haye, the Imperial headquarters.

For once the omniscient Mesnil had gone astray. Telegrams telling of a French retreat awaited them at the farm, but the details were less unpleasant than might have been expected. As the Chief of the Staff had conjectured, Bréheville had tried to hold the line of the Vezouse, and had failed. With the Germans about three to one—Mesnil was careful to explain—he could hardly have hoped otherwise. But he had retired in perfect order to Lunéville, and was now behind the Meurthe, his right wing in touch with Dreyfus at St. Die, his retreat clear to Epinal, where Clisserole lay ready to re-enforce him at a moment's notice. The worst feature of last night's encounter was the desperate conflict which waged for close on two hours round the village of Marainvillers, and which resulted in the almost total destruction of a French regiment—"the Eightieth!" said Mesnil, going through the various telegrams.

"The Eightieth!" shouted Napoleon; "they can barely have reached Lunéville yesterday afternoon."

Mesnil looked surprised. "That is so, your Majesty. They were delayed twenty-four hours at Orleans."

"And you mean to tell me they went into action the same evening?"

"It appears so."

Napoleon declared that the thing was scandalous, and Mesnil agreed with him. "Bréheville," the latter grumbled, "had strict orders not to fight east of the Meurthe. He had no business to be at Marainvillers at all."

"Go on," cried the Emperor with a shrug of disgust that was not all pretence. But not much more remained to tell. Bréheville trusted, in language as modest as telegraphic language can be, that the next forty-eight hours would bring him a chance of redeeming his character, and that was all.

Alas, that these sanguine expectations should prelude an afternoon of terrors!

The first note of evil reached headquarters close on mid-day. Bréheville, misled by clouds of Bavarian uhlans, who would persist in heading towards St. Die, had kept continually moving in a southeasterly direction; while the inarticulate Klein, commandant of Nancy, could n't be got to budge from his shaded pavements; that was all to begin with; and the wording of the telegram, indicating as it did that Klein was already apprised of some mistake, gave hope that he would be able to rectify it before too late.

But two o'clock brought tidings of genuine disaster. "Ten thousand Bavarians have crossed the Meurthe at Varangeville-St. Nicholas, eight miles below this city," wailed Klein. "Direct communications with Bréheville no longer possible. Line to Lunéville, St. Die, and Epinal intercepted. Have informed Clisserole."

Napoleon and his staff were returning from a general inspection when this message was put into Mesnil's hands. The latter passed it to his master directly they were alone together in the farmhouse dining-room. For very shame, the Emperor, with his heart throbbing, forced himself to copy the other's imperturbable demeanour, while he waited with a sickening dread for him to speak. But the General was plunged in a profound reverie, which might have lasted hours, had the usually silent Klein permitted. The Lieutenant-Colonel's messages

came pouring in in reckless profusion. The ten thousand Bavarians soon swelled into an army. They were coming northwards towards Nancy. They were moving south to cut off Bréheville from Epinal. He, Klein, had sent repeated messages to Clisserole, but without result. He was himself ready to face the enemy, and only waited for instructions.

"He shall go at once," Napoleon cried, all excitement; "these people must not cross the Moselle."

"With all respect to your Majesty," said the still thoughtful Mesnil, "Klein must stay where he is. He must guard the Malzéville gate. This little job is for Clisserole, and for no one else."

The General sank a second time into dreams. "Yes," he repeated before long, "Clisserole will have to tackle these people. The only thing is *where?*"

The next minute "these people" were kind enough to answer the question. For, while Mesnil was still rapt in thought, a telegram purporting to come from General Bréheville was laid upon the table. It told with military precision how that the enemy had crossed the Meurthe, and was now marching to the line of the Mortaigne with a view to cutting off Clisserole from his lieutenant, the sender. "Which is absurd," cried Mesnil, and he gave a sigh of relief. "In the first place, Bréheville is no longer able to telegraph via Nancy. Secondly, what in God's name should the Prussians want down at Rambervillers. They have sent this message themselves: they fancy they are in Zululand. I'll be even with them yet." So saying, the little gentleman sprang forward to the table, seized pen and paper, and commenced to scribble unciphered instructions to Bréheville and Douay at St. Die. He bade them to continue to watch the Meurthe from Lunéville to Fraize; and to keep irregulars along the hills about La Plaine, even unto the Donon if they could,—"Clisserole has orders to march on Rambervillers. If that don't bring 'em post haste to Pont St. Vincent," he concluded, with an evil snigger, "my name's not Claude Augustus."

Napoleon watched him, himself helpless and be-

wildered. Everything seemed so simple, yet he dared not make a suggestion. He could not so much as think of one that seemed in the least degree reasonable.

"Clisserole must make a dash for Pont St. Vincent," Mesnil went on; "the railway is—"

"But, my dear General," the Emperor broke in desperately, "why bring him thirty-six miles northwards? Have we not an army corps at Toul?"

"B-r-r-r—we will not talk about that, if you please. I have other work for them."

## Chapter IX

"Why not Klein?" Napoleon persisted.

"I have told you, sire, Klein must remain at Nancy. I want to keep him fresh for Mayence, please God."

"It seems to me that every town along the frontier has its army corps, and meanwhile the enemy are suffered to pierce into our territory. Take Longwy; I cannot for the life of me see why we should keep troops in that rat-trap. Do you forget Sedan?"

"Hardly."

"It seems to me that we shall repeat it."

"Tell me," Mesnil interposed, dropping his voice to a mysterious whisper, "am I to have a free hand in this business?"

"I suppose so."

"Then his Majesty's strictures do not apply. For I intend, if all goes well, to violate the neutrality of Luxembourg."

Napoleon stared.

"It is quite simple," Mesnil urged with extreme cheerfulness. "That Nassau fellow, Adolf, or whatever he calls himself, won't make much fuss about it. He can't love his Imperial cousin—not if he has any bowels, and hankers still in memory after Bieberich and the Kochbrunnen. And if he does n't mind, no one else will."

"Carache may object."

"Oh, Carache!" muttered Mesnil, full of contempt. "I trust I am not to be answerable to him. Neither your Majesty nor I want to be bothered by these triflers at such a moment. I am forgetting Clisserole."

"There," he cried, after five minutes' labourious writing, "I think that will meet the case. It contains all that your Majesty has recommended, so I need hardly trouble you. I'll see to its going myself."



The little man had his hand upon the door.

"Mesnil, Mesnil," cried the Emperor with an abruptness that did not lack pathos, "are you sure that you are doing right? Suppose Clisserole fails to catch the enemy, they will assuredly get between us and Paris. Let us break camp—now, at once, and march to Commercy—to Vitry—anywhere, anywhere, so that we may get away from this cursed inaction."

"Impossible. My plan alone is practicable. Whether it is also right is another matter. This time to-morrow we shall know—patience, patience."

"This time to-morrow!" Napoleon murmured bitterly; "how *shall* I pass the time till then? There must still be much to do—tell me, tell me, is there no task with which I can busy myself?" He flung all reserve to the four winds, holding out both hands to his lieutenant in an attitude of piteous supplication.

"I should recommend your Majesty to busy yourself with a good supper and as long a night's rest as the enemy permits." With this gentle admonition given, he stole away.

So this, then, was the glorious excitement of a great campaign! At last he was tasting the fierce joys his soul had dreamt of in bygone days, when the sound of music or the sight of some beauteous face had stirred his emotions to their depth.

But where were those sudden midnight marches?—those eagle swoops upon his careless prey?—those brilliant strokes of generalship, made at the eleventh hour, and turning disaster into victory? These had all been details in the vanished picture. Alas, where were they?

The net was tightening, truly,—but he himself was in it. And instead of being suffered to cut the woven meshes by some great *coup de théâtre* that should make men talk significantly about the reputation of Alexander—he was compelled to move cautiously inside a faste narrowing circle, so that, provided he got out at all, he might get out in accordance with established rules. The drudgery of it! How vividly it reminded him of those dreary pleadings which used to come his way so seldom that he could never properly understand them.

And then, the terrible anxiety, the perpetual brooding. Fighting by deputy seemed to have deprived him of all else. Save for a few brief moments, the period since the declaration of war had gone by in a series of horrible dreams. Try as he would, he could not cast them from him. One morning, early, a regiment, full of valour and enthusiasm, passes beneath his balcony and infects him with a genuine touch of its own brave spirit. Before another day has broken, half its strength lies dead, and he at once slides back into his former terror.

In a word, the burden was too heavy for his shoulders. He carried it into his bedroom, but it became no lighter. As he lay full-length upon his bed, with face turned upward to the low-pitched ceiling and mind hopelessly prostrate, he found himself vaguely regretting the old days, filled as they had been with mean cares and wants, yet rarely ruffled, and then only by nervous half-hours at Nisi Prius.

Godefroy made repeated noisy entries. His heart was chilled by the sight of this relapse, but nothing he could do could end it. The summer afternoon drifted off into evening, and his Majesty still lay prostrate.

In time the butler could endure the ignominy of the thing no longer. He laid a not over-gentle hand upon his master's shoulder. "Come, it is close upon seven. You must eat something."

Napoleon groaned out that he did not care for food.

"I see," Godefroy rejoined with biting emphasis, and forgetful of his own weak hour, "the dry rot has got in. We are close to Bouillon, that's one comfort."

The Emperor closed his weary eyes, opening them again the very next minute, as though on second thoughts he preferred the ceiling.

Godefroy assumed a gentler tone. "Be brave, my Emperor! What shall we do if you lose courage?"

"Godefroy, Godefroy," faintly smiling, "we ought never to have tempted Providence. If only I had been allowed to remain content with what I had."

"God bless my soul, you must n't talk like that. What would folks say if they could hear you? Listen to this!" and he produced a newspaper cutting from his

waistcoat pocket: "I got it this morning from Paris. 'The Emperor, on ascending the throne, came into a sacred trust, whereof war forms part. No Bonaparte may rule this land shorn of its fairest provinces. To Napoleon III France without Alsace-Lorraine meant Chiselhurst; to Napoleon IV it would signify a speedy return to Pimlico and the Royal Courts of Justice, where his early life was spent—not too prosperously, if report speaks true.' There, that's your real position; that's the way you ought to look at things. You will never make a great general if you worry about yourself and what you stand to lose. You *shall* get up. Take food if you can; if you can't, go and get a breath of evening air."

Numbed as he was by three hours' prostration, Napoleon yet could appreciate the wisdom of Godefroy's counsels. Nor had he any desire to stay longer in this smoke-begrimed and crooked little room, with its ungainly bed, all smelling feathers, and crowned by an uncovered canopy-frame which scraped the ceiling. So he gathered his forlorn limbs into a sitting posture, and waited resigned while Godefroy collected his coat and cap and sword from their haphazard resting-places upon the floor.

They went together down the wooden staircase: yesterday, maybe, it had creaked under the feet of merry children.

"Is he within?" Napoleon asked as they passed Mesnil's door.

"He is over at Chambley," Godefroy said, not relishing the contrast. When they reached the hall, he turned and implored his master to be brisk and lively, and to remember what depended on his personal demeanour.

The evening air fanned Napoleon's brow and helped to wake him from his lethargy. He stood a while with face turned westward, gazing upon the belt of reddening wood that edged the plateau and sloped away to Jaulny. Beneath it he could descry the Mad winding towards Moselle, and Villecey, sober and peaceful, content with the narrow ledge of valley the river left it. The pros-

pect soothed him, but it soon palled. He set out at a sharp pace eastwards, in the direction of Pagny.

His way for about two miles ran in delicious solitude along the edge of a forest glade and within sound of falling water. The slowly dying light among the trees increased the charm; he felt he had strayed into fairy-land. The town came as an unwelcome interruption. Had Mademoiselle Leduc been on guard at her bowered window, she would certainly have gathered some intelligence for Prehlen. She was, however, more agreeably employed, so the dejected little figure in general's uniform passed beneath her window unobserved.

He strolled slowly along the Vandières road. Why, he could not tell; perhaps the choice was a piece of unconscious imitation—Mesnil had visited Chambley at one end of the lines; he would visit Vandières at the other. Whatever his reason, it did not seem strong enough to carry him along the mile or so of darkening road that divided him from his destination. He began to wish himself back at La Grange-en-Haye on his tomb-like bed. His present mood was one that preferred short-cuts to contradiction. Accordingly, utterly careless of the woods and rivulets in his way, he turned off the main road and started to mount a likely upland path.

It was a steep pull. The infirmity of purpose that had dogged him hitherto dogged him still; he speedily grew dubious as to the value of this lane of his, which was already winding suspiciously southward. He vowed that every step should be his last, but he still pushed on. And his patience was rewarded after a mile of incessant climbing, when he lit upon a broader road, which led in a more favourable direction.

It crossed the ridge a few yards to the right of its highest point. Before following it, Napoleon turned on the close-cropped grass and breasted the incline: perhaps it, too, trended southward.

The light still favoured. No point among these spurs of the Argonne affords a very extensive view, but the Emperor could see far enough eastward to make him forget to sweep his glasses over the tract behind him,

which held La Grange-en-Haye. For, over there, beyond the broad river that lay glistening at his feet, he could descry the half-dozen dull white stones which marked where the deserted, transpontine fragment of his empire sank away into Lorraine. He scanned the frontier from the point it touches the Moselle, opposite Pagny, to its wooded heights above Villonville. And there came into his much-haunted brain the thought how ominous it looked—that sweep of silent hills, crowned, here and there, with dense lines of forest whose foremost trees stood with their leaves absolutely still, unmoved by the faint breeze which fluttered the ends of his unbuttoned overcoat, lifting the wispy hair from his sallow temples.

Not a soul stirred along the confines of that sombre realm. No turf-clad fortress disclosed the hideous outline of its cannon. The sole sign of life, perhaps, the flickering reed of transparent smoke ascending from some cottage chimney to lose itself in the darkening crimson of the sky. How full of menace that summer stillness looked! How pregnant with fearful vengeance and destruction! So a fresh wave of fear found its way into the heart of this little figure on the hilltop. He thought shudderingly upon the terrible foe who was hurrying forward to take up the gauntlet he had flung. "To take up!" Why, it had been taken up already; and the great God alone could say what horrors were enacting at this moment outside Toul.

Darkness settled down over the hills and left only shadows. The wind grew colder. Napoleon commenced to shiver. He drew his great-coat closer round him, and hurried to resume his homeward way.

"You are late on your rounds to-night," said a voice behind him.

He wheeled about sharply. A young soldier—fair, and Teutonic-looking, and dressed in the uniform of a captain of artillery—advanced towards him out of the gloom of a clump of trees. His hand was lifted to his cap, but he bore himself with so much easy confidence that it was clear that some degree of familiarity existed between himself and the general for whom he mistook



Napoleon. His smiling countenance straightened directly he caught sight of Napoleon's face.

He stopped, and saluted again.

"I am sure I beg your pardon, General," he muttered in a deprecatory tone, "I took you for Brigadier Marchmont."

"Captain, I wish I were," was the gracious answer. Napoleon liked the modest appearance of this young officer, with his well-knit frame and open face. He was indeed a refreshing change after the wine-stained Changarnier and those dapper little aides-de-camp who flitted to and fro with Mesnil's messages, and spent their leisure waxing their moustaches.

"I wish I were. The Brigadier is a brave and capable officer. You are doubtless—no doubt you are under his command?" What would he not have given at that moment for one touch of Mesnil's omniscience?

"I am his nephew," the Captain murmured, "the son of his eldest sister."

"Aha," laughed his Majesty, "that's it, is it. Well, Captain—Captain—"

"Müller."

"Well, Captain Müller, may you turn out as good a man as the Brigadier." Then he remembered the weak-mouthed man with watery eyes and unruly eyeglass, and wished he had n't spoken.

"Thank you, General," laughed Müller. "That is my battery behind the trees yonder. You are probably from headquarters?"

"Yes."

"What do you think of Mesnil?" the young officer proceeded naïvely to inquire. "For my part I think he is inclined to look southward too much. He must watch not southward only, but north and east, yes, and westward. Be sure of this, General: the key of the whole position in their eyes is, Napoleon, alive or dead."

The picture was not a pleasant one. The Emperor shuddered and looked furtively across the shrouded valley.

"What is that?" he asked, pointing straight in front of him."

"Müller levelled his glasses. "You mean the light in front of Vittonville?"

"Yes—look, it is moving! Now it has gone."

"This same thing has happened twice before," Müller answered. "Last night, and three nights ago. I should say it meant an attack. Ah, there comes my uncle."

They could hear heavy footsteps trudging along the roadway beneath them. Presently a dark figure came into view.

"A peasant," added the Captain in disgust. "Shall I challenge him, General?"

"No need—he has satisfied the sentries. It is quite certain that the Brigadier will come this way?"

"He has never missed yet. That fellow means to speak with us."

The peasant had stopped. He was of a goodly size, and Müller's companion did not at all like the look of him. "The peasants about here are treacherous I have heard," said he.

"Hi, there," shouted the stranger at that moment, "am I right for La Grange-en-Haye?"

"What can he want there?" muttered Müller.

"Cannot you answer a polite question?" vociferated the peasant in the thick patois of Lorraine. "Why do you stand there like a couple of scarecrows?"

"Speak to him."

"Have you business with the Emperor?" cries the Captain.

"Yes, I have."

"Ask him what it is."

"What is it?"

"That's for him and me to talk about when we meet," the peasant answered.

He showed signs of moving on. "Wait," cried Napoleon, "we will join you down there." The next minute they were face to face with—one had almost said under the shadow of—this Lorrainer of herculean proportions.

"Now," said the Emperor, "what do you want?"

"I want his Majesty, and no one else."

"Be careful how you behave, my friend," interposed Müller. "Monsieur is of very high rank."

"That is nothing to me. I want his Majesty. I've got to speak with him, and with no one else."

"And you *shall* speak with him," said Napoleon. "I, also, am bound for the farm. Do you care to accompany me?"

The old fellow grumbled out an ungracious yes. Napoleon turned gaily to his companion.

"Good-night, Captain. The Emperor shall hear of you and your views, never fear. Who knows, you may yet end your days as a Marshal of France."

"Perhaps the young gentleman has horses to lend us?"

"Is your matter so urgent as all that?" asked Napoleon. "It cannot be over three miles."

"Besides," Müller added, "horses would not help you, as you know well enough."

"I know!" cried the peasant, staring with wide eyes at the last speaker, "why, man, I have never been in France before. I am from Mardigny, in Lorraine."

Both officers were visibly startled. "I made sure this was some yokel from the neighbourhood," muttered the younger man.

"So you are from Lorraine?" commenced the elder. But the peasant would tolerate no more conversation. "Come, sir," said he roughly, "if you mean to lead me to his Majesty, please set out at once. Otherwise I must find my way as best I can alone. I've no time to lose. When I left home, five hours back, half a dozen Prussian swine were ransacking my place for beer. If I do not get back quickly, they'll be walking off with my cows."

"Then the Prussians are in Mardigny," Müller cried.

"In Mardigny!" with a fine contempt. "Bless your silly soul, that's only the sick. Most of the regiment has been in Vittonville since ten this morning."

"Is that your message?—Müller, a horse!—here, you Lorrainer, you need not accompany me. I will carry your news."

"Oh no, you won't. You haven't got it yet; and

you're not likely to. I have had all the trouble of coming so far; and now I'm here, I mean to see his Majesty."

Hark, what was that? No need to ask a second time; for there it came again! the roar of cannon well-nigh in their ears. The whole valley sprang for an instant into a lurid glare, then sank back into darkness. Their own hills, beneath them and on either side, took up the tale. Shell went screaming forth from grassy nooks which just now stood silent and deserted, and which, only half an hour ago, had shone forth in dying purple—havens of sweet repose. From Vandières came the sharp crackle of mitrailleuse, and with it a pall of smoke, darkening the night.

"So this is it," muttered Napoleon. "Well, make your mind easy. The Emperor already knows of this attack, while Mesnil will have had word from Vandières full three minutes ago."

"They don't and can't know what I have got to tell them. You may be a general, but you are not doing your master much good by keeping me from him. And you sha'n't any longer. I'm off."

There came a fresh burst of thunder from below. Voices mingled with the roar of artillery and the clatter of approaching horsemen.

"Quick, quick, you imbecile; say what you have to say. I am the Emperor."

"I thought as much. My wife has a bust of you at home," and he contemplated his Majesty with gentle satisfaction.

The small cortège which they had heard far off swept into view. "It is General Marchmont," muttered Müller, as the foremost rider drew rein abreast of them and flung his hand high above his head as a signal to his companions.

"General Marchmont," said Napoleon, stepping forward almost to touch that officer's bridle, "I am glad of this opportunity."

Marchmont peered down at him: "My word, the Emperor! The game is beginning, sire," said he, pointing across the valley.

"Truly." Our hero could already scent the faint odour of gunpowder, and he did not like it at all.

"We expected this," resumed the Brigadier.

"Surely they have not crossed the Ca—"

"Pardon, one moment," interrupted the other, his eyes fixed sternly on his nephew. "To your battery, sir. What the devil are you doing here?"

"You do n't take this for the commencement of a real attack?" Napoleon asked.

The General glanced down at the other's eager face. "Real attack," muttered he; "I am sure I hope so. I certainly cannot tell."

"I can, though," boomed in the deep voice of the Lorrainer. It might have been a signal for the storm to begin again. The mitrailleuse indeed had never quite been silent; they spit forth now with a redoubled vigour. Marchmont pricked his ears. He felt convinced that the greatest noise came from the nearer side. Both he and Napoleon had already turned with looks of eager inquiry to the last speaker,—"out with it, then," he exclaimed brusquely"; neither his Majesty nor I have time to waste."

"You're not the only people with that complaint. If you had n't had so much to say among yourselves, you might have had my story twenty minutes ago."

"My name is Caspar Schmidt," he went on after a short pause, and relapsing into sing-song narrative, "I am a Lorrainer from Mardigny. My old woman says, if only you French can win back the provinces we shall have lighter taxes and better weather for the pigs. And I,—I have no objection to doing you a good turn."

"You are a noble fellow," said Napoleon.

Caspar did not heed this tribute. He shut his eyes tightly, and, with his head thrown well back, continued his narrative.

"Five days ago the first gang of Prussians entered Mardigny. My son John—he's been in Germany, you know—declares that they were Würtemberg infantry; but I think they must have been Prussians, they looked so damnably ugly. There were about five hundred of them. They halted in the square for about two hours,



ate their dinner, then marched on toward Vittonville and Champey. From that time forward up to mid-day to-day our street has never been empty. The Prussians seemed to pour through, and my son John—he's been in Germany, you know—says that at least eight thousand men must have got through from first to last."

"But my wife, she thinks different. She came to me yesterday afternoon in our back kitchen and she said to me: 'Caspar,' she said, winking and nodding, 'how many men should you think have gone through the village since last Sunday?'—'My dear,' said I, 'John has been in Germany, and he says that quite four regiments must have passed through.'—'John may have been in Jericho,' she answered,—she does n't think much of John, my wife do n't,—'I'll wager my life that not more than a thousand men have gone through this village since the commencement of the war. I've seen the same faces march in at one end and out at the other over and over again for the last five days.'"

"Sire, they are fighting hand-to-hand below," Marchmont interrupted, under his breath. "I must not stay here any longer." He shook out his reins; his following did likewise.

"At least, my dear General, leave me a horse."

"Lieutenant Severin," jerked out Marchmont, "dis-mount for his Majesty and attach yourself to Captain Müller's battery. Dubost, do you accompany the Emperor."

"One thing more," cried Napoleon, with a laugh that was intended for an apology. Marchmont reined up again in obedience to this summons, but some of the black clouds overhanging the valley seemed to have wreathed themselves about his brow.

"Mesnil shall have ample reinforcements ready for you."

"We shall not need them. Good-night, your Majesty."

"Good-night, General."

All sound of Marchmont and his staff died speedily away.

Caspar resumed: "As I was saying, my old woman

put thoughts into my head which would not go. Three Prussian malingerers were billeted on us. At first they wanted to sit in the kitchen, but my old woman got John to tell them—he's been in Germany, you know—that they were too good for peasant folk like us. So they sat in the front parlour and jabbered away at the top of their voices. You see, they didn't know that the partition was only thin wood or that John had been in Germany; but we didn't forget, you may be sure of that. They talked a deal about their ailments, and last night one of them said, 'I should n't stay behind like this, even if my feet were twice as bad, only I know that this is not to be a real attack. We shall have to go back by Metz, to Conflans, so we lose nothing by resting.' For my part, I don't believe there is a single German between Metz and Vittonville. All this noise and shouting," waving his hand toward the valley, "is merely to turn your attention from the north. The Emperor and Rumpenheim are at Conflans by now. That's all I have got to say."

"And quite enough too. Captain Dubost, hurry after Marchmont and tell him what our friend has just told me. He and Favoust must be ready to evacuate Vandières and march northwards at a word from me. Here, give me the bridle—thanks, Caspar"—the peasant had helped him into the saddle—"be off with you, Dubost. Good-night."

He turned to the peasant.

"Will you follow me up to the farm? Or perhaps you prefer to stay with Captain Müller on the summit yonder?"

"Neither. I shall go back home." Caspar turned off the roadway, down the grassy slopes shelving to the river.

"Good-night, then, Caspar Schmidt of Mardigny. If I conquer, we shall meet again."

"Good-night," growled Caspar. "Make the taxes lighter; that's all we want over at Mardigny."

"It shall be altogether exempt." Laughing gaily, Napoleon set spurs to his horse and sprang forward on his homeward road.

With weighty work like this to his hand, and the dying

roar of battle in his ears, he could not go fast enough. The main road became a cart-track. The cart-track dwindled away into pathless downs and reappeared fitfully. Winding streamlets interposed their double, triple barriers of sluggish water. He conquered every obstacle. His only thought, the Prussians close to Conflans; and, without prompt action, himself cut off from Verdun and driven into Toul.

The great occasion was come at last. Thank God, his soul and brain were rising to it. He knew—he *knew* that he had always had it in him.

## Chapter X

The Emperor, still red-hot, breasted the last incline that cut him off from victory. La Grange-en-Haye lay shrouded in darkness. A feeble light flickered at a single window. Napoleon recognized it as his own. A strange silence brooded over the narrow plateau. Not a soul stirred. The gay young aides-de-camp, the officers of the staff, the mounted messengers who had pressed about and around the house three hours back, all were gone. The Imperial guard had struck their tents and likewise departed. A solitary dismounted cuirassier stood motionless before the porch, and the candle from our hero's bedroom flickered its reflection on his sword.

But the gloom outside was nothing to the dreariness within. A first step across the threshold dissipated Napoleon's ardour. A chill went to his heart, and weighed it down like lead.

The hall staggered along in semi-obscurity under the rays of a petroleum-lamp. The doors round it stood wide open, and each one let out darkness. An oaken table, the sole piece of furniture the passage boasted, lay prostrate. The pegs and hat-racks had been swept of their contents. Envelopes, addressed to himself and minus *theirs*, lay scattered about the floor.

What did it mean?

"Godefroy!" he cried.

The gallery above his head commenced creaking under the familiar step. His own bedroom door drew open. The valet emerged onto the landing and peered over the balustrade. He held a candle, the candle which had lit Napoleon from his window; it cast a lurid halo round the old man's head.

"Godefroy," Majesty repeated pathetically, straining

up at him,—“Godefroy, it’s not yet ten o’clock! What does this mean?”

“Sire, ascend. You will find it cosier up here.”

But the other would not mount a single stair without further and better particulars. So his servant craned over the banister and told him all he knew.

How Mesnil had come racing in from Chambley ten minutes after Napoleon had started on his evening stroll; how, thereupon, messengers had torn off in all directions; how the telegraph-hut had been crowded nearly out of existence; and how the shaky old farm had reeled under hurrying feet. The Imperial guard had taken the road first. The General, surrounded by the headquarters staff, had brought up the rear. He did not know their destination, save that it lay somewhere in the direction of Etain. With the exception of a troop of horse under Major Garin, and himself and Lieutenant Mascout, the old fellow understood that there was not a single fighting man left in the whole camp. The Chief of the Staff, he wound up, had left a note.

“Fling it down,” exclaimed Bonaparte with biblical brevity.

Godefroy disappeared a second, then lumbered down the staircase bearing Mesnil’s missive.

“Honoured Master,” the General wrote, “your health causes me grave anxiety. Your pallor, your want of appetite ever since I have been in your company, that excessive lassitude of which M. Godefroy complains, all point one way. De Morin warned me before we started. Sire, I know of your disease. Your illustrious father would probably have perished of angina pectoris, had heaven not preferred the Dauphine Gate. Without a doubt the malady has marked you for its own. Courage, O my King! I hear that you spent the afternoon upon your bed; that you have now gone out for a little promenade. You are wise, dear sovereign. Pursue this regimen, and all will yet be well. Need I tell you how much hangs upon your frail body? Pardon the pitying epithet. You are not alone among great captains in your physical infirmities. Instance Dutch William, not to mention François-Henri de Montmorency, duc de Luxembourg.



Eat well, cherished leader; drink plenty of nourishing beverages, port, brandy, and the like (Godefroy complains that you imbibe too much tea), and above all get your fill of sleep. Procure a good night's rest at La Grange. Major Gorin remains to bring you on betimes, to-morrow. Marchmont, who preserves our retreat to Frouard and the railways, will be close at hand to guard your slumbers. Au revoir, Majesty. (Signed) Mesnil, Chief of the Staff."

"P.S.—The wily Rumpenheim is well on his way to Verdun. I am off to try conclusions with him; and shall hope to catch him not far from Conflans. Plenty of time to join us in the forenoon, dear lord. Come with rosy cheeks, and *without* that ashen look of death in your face and weary eyes. Such a coming will equal two brigades. Second P.S.—Clisserole has caught the enemy this side of Toul. With what result I know not. M."

The Emperor crumpled the note between twitching fingers.

"Godefroy, I feel very faint," said he.

"The General said you might," murmured the servant.

"Godefroy, look at me." Godefroy looked. "Do I appear very pale, Godefroy?"

"You do n't show over-grand," consented the other.

"Waxen, would you say, Godefroy?"

The old fellow nearly singed the Imperial nose.

"H'mn, a bit suety perhaps."

"Godefroy,"—and the young man's voice grew even fainter,—“would it be correct to say that there was an ashen look of death in my weary eyes?"

"Sire, I think you had better go to bed."

"I mean to go to bed, Godefroy. But first, Godefroy, tell me, do I look like a man who might expire any minute of heart disease?"

"The little chap has been laying it on rather thick," muttered the servant under his breath.

"Answer me," insisted his master.

"You do not look well." And the butler could not be prevailed upon to commit himself any deeper.

So the Emperor went very gingerly to bed. And

Godefroy brought him a steaming glass of brandy and water. Dr. Mesnil had thoughtfully ordered it before his departure. And the one flaring light was snuffed; and our hero turned on his side to escape the dim outlines of the frowsy canopy, and prepared himself for a sleepless night that should hover on the brink of the grave.

His pulse was extremely feeble. He could hear his heart against the pillow. Once he felt tempted to ring for Godefroy and a trifle more hot brandy; but on second thoughts he deemed it wiser not to stir. But presently an unaccountable drowsiness settled upon him. He sank into a dreamless sleep (which, later on, cannon could not break) murmuring: "Angina pectoris—De Morin never told me *that*—poor father."

And, meanwhile, Mesnil and his merry men were marching through the summer night towards Etain.

When our hero awoke, the sun was peeping in beneath his canopy. He thought of his ailment the minute he opened his eyes. He felt no better. His head sang. His pulse, though a trifle harder, still went along in jerks. The heart itself made less noise, but that was the malady. Sleep could not refresh him; the daylight brought him no encouragement. He was in a parlous state indeed. He looked at his watch. Five o'clock. He could lay abed another hour. He would rise at six, snatch a hearty breakfast, and follow Mesnil to Etain. He knew quite well that he would never get there alive.

But the day waned instead of brightening. He glanced at his watch a second time. A quarter past five, and not a soul stirring, to judge by the silence out of doors.

And yet the day *was* waning, of that there could be no shadow of doubt. Presently he understood why. He was dying. The sky, which grew dimmer as he looked at it, waned only for him. He was dying in the midst of his legions, here, in this deserted farmhouse, beneath the faded pall. Had ever earth beheld such another tragedy? He commenced to think of the headline in to-morrow's *Times*. Tears welled to his eyes and

rolled down the front of his pyjamas. He would n't ring. Godefroy should find him dead.

But Godefroy tapped at that moment.

"Come in," murmured the sufferer. He noticed that his servant looked kempt and fresh, considering the early hour.

"Do you feel any better?" broke out the domestic, cheerily.

"Godefroy, I am dying," very faintly. "The day is growing dim."

"And what else does your Majesty expect at this hour? You are not dying. You have had a good long sleep. Come, sire, you must get up and eat something."

"I cannot eat," in the articles of death.

"Oh yes, you can if you try. Your supper has been ready this half-hour."

"Supper!" murmured the invalid.

"Yes, supper. Surely you do not expect breakfast at six o'clock at night? Is your Majesty aware that you have been sleeping nearly eighteen hours on end?"

"I *thought* the day was closing in," remarked the Emperor in rather firmer tones.

"You will shave?" asked Godefroy, who was now bustling about the room.

"Why did you not wake me?" came the peevish answer.

"The General left orders that you were not to be disturbed."

"It's like his impertinence. I still feel exceedingly unwell, but I suppose I must push on to Etain. No, I sha'n't shave; I have n't got the strength. Saddle my horse, and take word to Major Gorin. Good God, to think I have been lying here nineteen hours! The whole army may very possibly be paralyzed for want of me. Mesnil may have been beaten!"

"Do not fret," grinned Godefroy; "we are not to go to Etain after all. The Chief hopes to be back here to-night. Did you not hear the firing?"

"Heavens, no!" shrieked his Majesty, bounding to the floor and flinging his *angina pectoris* to the winds. "You do not mean to tell me that General Mesnil has dared fight a battle in my absence?"

Godefroy grew stolid as death.

"I can tell you nothing. Your Majesty *will* shave; you have not done so since we left Paris. Aha, that sounds like the little General"—horses below—"he is early. Get back into bed, sire, while I fetch your hot water."

Napoleon obeyed.

The valet instantly reappeared.

"Brigadier Marchmont is here. He must see you at once."

"But I am in my pyjamas," pleaded Bonaparte.

"He will take no denial."

"Show him up," came the sullen answer. And Bonaparte leant back among his pillows, and commenced to think afresh about his heart.

The Brigadier came thumping in, and took his stand at the foot of the Imperial bed. The flabby lines about his mouth (so far as the beard had shown them in former days) had creased themselves entirely out. All that hesitancy and aimlessness which had marked him hitherto had gone their way. The eyeglass with them. Napoleon, who kept his own eyes pretty tight on the canopy, ventured to cast a few side glances in the officer's direction. He noted the great change in the latter's bearing. He marked the metallic ring in the voice. How different all this from that moaning imbecile he had met in Bonvalet's quarters. He regarded this new phase as so much affectation. He also considered it extremely ill-timed. Surely the fellow must know that he was at the bedside of a man whose father would have died of an acutely painful constriction of the chest "had not heaven preferred the Dauphine Gate."

Majesty opened the interview by a gentle reference to his complaint. He was looking into the pall once more, so he did not notice how Marchmont chafed. He dwelt touchingly on the premonitory symptoms which were on him now to warn him of the return of an ancient foe. He murmured, "The heart, Brigadier!" giving a wag of his head that was meant to mingle sorrow and laughter. He went on to explain with growing faintness that his father had nearly died of angina pectoris. He wound up

that both he and Mesnil had thought it better that he should take a day off. And that he was now merely waiting for his shaving-water and his break—supper to rejoin his army and give the enemy battle.

Marchmont here broke in that he was sorry to hear it. He, however, brought news which might help to restore his Majesty to something like his usual health. The sovereign felt better at once, though he did not admit it. For one thing, Clisserole, making good use of the strategic railway, had caught the enemy at Francheville, this side of Toul, late last night. Toul, he added parenthetically, was not twenty-two miles from Imperial headquarters. Whereat Napoleon shuddered. Well, the General had held the foe at Francheville, and had beaten them in the small hours of the morning (when the day was softly dawning, and—and—your Majesty was on your sick-bed), and had driven them pell-mell on to Nancy, where Klein was dealing with them at his leisure. Mesnil, for his part, had fallen in with Rumpenheim by Parfondrupt-Manheulles, this side of the Orne. Parfondrupt-Manheulles, he added parenthetically, was not twenty-five miles from Imperial headquarters. Whereat Napoleon shuddered. Well, the little Chief had caught the Prussians towards three of the morning, and no doubt the contending armies were at it now. Marchmont himself was on his way with his brigade to Giraulmont, in obedience to an express just come in.

The invalid naturally asked what about his own Imperial person. Gorin's troops, he justly pointed out, was hardly a sufficient force to guard bedridden angina pectoris.

It was the first time Marchmont showed the least symptom of his old indecisive manner. His képi was hidden by the bedboard from Napoleon's view. He commenced fumbling with it. Then he remarked hurriedly that Mesnil had directed him to make arrangements. "Your Majesty will be perfectly safe at La Grange. If all goes well, Mesnil hopes to be back here towards midnight on his way to Pont-a-Mousson."

"Did the General mention that in his express?"

"Yes," and Marchmont recommenced fumbling. Hap-



pily he got away from the note without reading it. The part about Napoleon ran after this fashion somewhat:

"Give a look in at headquarters on your way. You will probably find Suet still abed. Let him know as much as you deem advisable about Francheville and Rumpenheim. Tell him that you 've got the word for Giraulmont. Leave Gorin a regiment for the protection of his valuable person. It's not enough, but we'll chance him for an hour or so. Throw in a word about heart disease, if you have time. Inform him that his nose looks bluer than usual."

The sufferer seemed satisfied, and tried to get back to his complaint. But the Brigadier cut him short, informing him that Giraulmont was fifteen miles away, and that he was an hour behind his rear guard. And with that farewell Marchmont thumped out of the room. Napoleon heard him jingle down the stairs, and mount his horse and clatter away. Then Majesty lay back and waited for the hot water.

So the two first moves had been in his favour. Really, he began to feel a trifle more robust. But he did not permit himself too great a rebound towards hopefulness. Nor did he think it would be wise to dress over-quickly. In fact, he half made up his mind to use the shaving-water—when it came—with a little more brandy, and thus go three quarters of the road to meet the coming night. He must husband his strength for that Napoleonic dash into the Reich ordained by Mesnil's skill. He did not grudge his lieutenants their victories. The old Emperor had kept to Mayence in the early days of seventy. La Grange was his Mayence: and the old Reich's founder had n't heart disease. He must tighten his weakly frame. If it smashed up in the struggle—well, France would gain. He pictured himself in his death-throes just the wrong side of the Bradenburg Gate, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he stifled two more tears.

His thoughts fled back to Muriel. If only she could see him now. She was thinking of him, *that* he knew. He knew also that she was romantic. All girls are, and this one had shown him the colour of her soul the night

of his Meaux dinner-party, when she had derided the "permanence of aspirations" so satisfying to most of his countrymen.

He contrasted the visions which he pictured in her mind with the stern reality.

She saw him, he doubted not, mounted upon his champing steed, his own mouth tight shut beneath a brow of thunder, directing the battle from a foolhardy eminence well within range. She noted his eagle eye—and he stretched out a hand to take a mirror and have a look at it himself—as it wandered over the combatants at his feet. She even heard the shells as they whistled round him. And she marvelled at his cool demeanour.

So much for fancy. Here was the truth. He lay stretched upon his couch of suffering, his massive brain and his frail body equidistant between two battle-fields, and in a sense he hovered over either. In a sense his master mind was at this moment sending two great armies to victory. Mesnil did well to rank him with Luxembourg.

What a strangely deceptive thing was glory. He had made identically the same mistake as his beloved in days gone by. Why, this farmhouse room was more squalid than Pimlico; yet it held a great captain, equidistant between two battles, and directing both, and at the same time dying of angina pectoris.

The rumble of approaching wheels floated through his open window. Mesnil had come early. Nor was it like the little General to drive. His master hoped that this was not growing pride. He felt that at all hazards he must see what sort of visage Claude Augustus wore. So he slipped again out of bed and crept to the window.

A barouche and pair came thundering down towards the farm from the ridge of the Villecey road. It was enveloped in an escort of his own Cuirassiers, and a cloud of dust. Mesnil should pay for this. The Emperor cowered behind the curtain as the new arrival swept into his gates. He recognized the imprudence,—in pyjamas, too,—but he must have a look at the victor. It would regulate his future conduct.

And it was not Mesnil after all!

But, instead, a gentleman garbed in the glittering uniform of Prussian Cuirassiers, with shiny helmet and familiar face. The stranger fondled his sword between his knees, and looked straight in front of him at the coachman's back. Napoleon guessed at once. His lieutenants had been beaten; this was his summons to Wilhelmshöhe. He cursed them both. He likewise crept trembling into bed.

Godefroy did not give him many minutes' respite. The old fellow came plunging into the Imperial bedroom, every sign of astonishment over his ruddy countenance.

"Count Merode-Neustadt is here, and desires to speak with you."

"I thought I knew the face," murmured Bonaparte. He added out loud:

"I won't see him. Tell him that I am over at Parfondrupt."

"He says he has heard the contrary from Brigadier Marchmont."

Napoleon groaned.

"Tell him, then, that it is very bad form for a late ambassador at Paris to come on such an errand."

"But you do n't know what he has come for yet."

"I can guess," the Monarch gloomily rejoined. "I suppose I must bow to superior force. Let him know that I will be with him directly."

But Godefroy merely shut the door carefully and came quite close to his master's bed, bending his mouth almost to touch the uppermost ear of the recumbent figure.

"I thought the same as you at first. But Major Gorin's men would surely not have brought him? And one of them whispered me the fragments of a rumour that Mesnil has beaten Rumpenheim."

The Emperor pushed him to one side and bounded onto the floor.

"I see it all!" he shouted. "I see it all! Shaving-water, Godefroy! and my campaign uniform—the old and dirty one!"

"Sire, be careful how you deal with him."

"Never fear, honest friend. They have had their innings; this is my turn."

Twenty minutes later, our hero walked sedately into the dining-room. Clean-shaven and kempt as regards his person, he wore his most faded uniform. Godefroy had swathed it in summer dust. The sovereign's boots were coated as well, and he laid képi and sword upon the table with an air of extreme weariness. Then he held out both hands to his visitor.

"Welcome, your Excellency," said he, not abating a jot of his gravity. "Your visit recalls happier times."

Merode-Neustadt stood beside the window, fondling his whiskers. The poor fellow looked as cheerful and ruddy and good-humoured as ever. If Mesnil had won a victory over at Parfondrupt, certainly the late Ambassador's demeanour contained nothing to show it. And when he spoke, he did not even balance his words—the first thing a legate does who is in difficulties.

"Sit down," resumed Napoleon, himself dropping into a rocking-chair which brushed the only seat available for his guest. "Sit down, and have a ci—" then he remembered his rôle in time to break off before reaching the cheroot.

"Your Majesty is extremely condescending," Merode replied. "You must pardon this little intrusion of mine. But war excuses all—sire, you know that better than any one."

"Yes, indeed."

"This will be bad weather for the harvest," the Count began again. "We want rain. I trust this extreme drought is merely partial; I have a good deal of stuff over in Posen," and for the fraction of a second he looked less genial.

"Ah, I do n't farm," Napoleon rejoined. "Ruination, you know, to all but the richest men."

"Ruination in truth," said his Excellency, cheering up.

Then they moved from the weather to a discussion on the relative merits of London and Vienna. Merode had spent many years as first secretary in the Austrian capi-

tal; but Napoleon doubted whether there was any city to touch the great metropolis for real enjoyment, "provided, of course, one is in the swim and manages to see the best people."

"I have heard that your English ladies are extremely beautiful."

"Have a cheroot?" the Emperor hurried out. "How rude of me not to have offered you one before."

"Thank you; I should enjoy one. I have been in the saddle a good deal to-day."

Bonaparte glanced at the clock.

"Ahem," he muttered, "that reminds me my time is limited. I have to get over to—ah—towards Chambley before dusk. I, too, have been on horseback since day-break this morning, over in the direction of Francheville, you know. The country is beautiful about here."

"It cannot touch Posen, in my opinion."

"Maybe not."

"Nor the scenery round Berlin," Merode added eagerly.

"Ah, I do not know Berlin."

"It is a beautiful city."

"Oh well," the Emperor retorted with consolation in his voice, "you and I, dear Count, must hope to be back in Paris before very long."

The Ambassador relapsed into dreams. The same happy smile played about his mouth as heretofore. His thoughts dwelt clearly on something, the memory of which pleased him very much.

"Sire," he commenced at last, "we none of us think anything at all of General Mesnil."

"You surprise me."

"His methods are antiquated to a startling degree. Only just before I came away, Count Rumpenheim was remarking how much he reminded him of Turenne. And who follows Turenne nowadays? He has the first two moves of the game; but we are bound to smash him in the end."

"So he *has* the first two moves," the Emperor murmured under his breath; "I am glad to hear that much." Aloud, he merely repeated:



"You surprise me."

Merode lost no part of his good-humoured tranquillity.

"Yes, we shall catch him the other side of Metz, when, sire, look out for another Sedan."

"So Rumpenheim is retreating?" Napoleon burst out.

"We are falling back to gather reinforcements from Coblenz and Mainz. Besides, our advance along the Verdun road was merely a feint."

"I understand."

And now the Ambassador became a trifle graver.

"You must have lost very heavily at Francheville?" he said.

"Nothing very terrible, I fancy."

"Our reports say that the field is saturated with blood—French blood. You certainly have suffered severely over yonder," and he jerked his head in the direction of Parfondrupt.

"Oh, I don't know," murmured his fellow-negotiator.

"I do, though. Before I left I saw your dead, mountains high. Sire," he burst out, with no great change of voice or manner, "cannot you and I stop this carnage?"

Napoleon stared at him.

"Let us show these butchers that peace has its victories, no less than war. They despise diplomatists and emperors—some emperors, that is. Let us show them what we are good for!"

"I dare n't," faltered the Monarch. "Carache, Mesnil, Brisson, the papers," he poured forth in reckless confusion, "the Assembly—Mu—de Morin, what would they all say? Really, I dare n't."

"Come, come, sire, do not excite yourself. Be tranquil. You will see at once that you are answerable to no one. You can do exactly what you please. And you may take it from me, your subjects will welcome such a gift."

"What do you offer?" said the Emperor, still trembling.

"We offer peace; each side to pay its own costs."

"After our — my — ahem, the two victories, we cannot possibly accept such terms."

"Very well," Merode promptly rejoined, "I will add to them. My master will give you all Alsace south, a straight line drawn between Belfort and Basel."

Our hero thanked God for his liberal education.

"The offer is absurd."

"We throw in Mulhouse."

"I must have the two provinces," the Emperor rejoined with growing decision.

"Oh, come," Merode soothed him; "you have no grounds on which to base such a demand."

"Then I must go on until I get grounds."

"We will help you in any designs against England," pleaded his Excellency.

"I must have the provinces, or nothing at all."

The Ambassador sighed.

"Won't Egypt do instead?"

"I must have the provinces. I went to war for the provinces; and the provinces I must have."

"You shall have all Alsace north of Markirch and Markolsheim — Lower Alsace in fact. And my master will throw in the corner of Lorraine southwest of Moyenvic and the canal."

"I want the provinces."

"That is the provinces — except for one or two odds and ends."

"I want Metz and Mulhouse."

"Then the butchery must go on," exclaimed Merode, rising from his chair.

"Stop!" cried Majesty, "your last offer is final?"

"The Count slid back. "Absolutely final. My master only makes it out of his deep love for humanity."

"I fully comprehend," sympathised Bonaparte, only too glad to get off on a side issue.

"His deep love for humanity," Merode repeated. "Philanthropy is one of the most distinguishing features of his glorious and ever-to-be-emulated, never-to-be-surpassed character. Of course he had the best tutors procurable, who received instructions to pay special attention to this branch of science."

"I understand perfectly."

"His tenderness," pursued the legate dreamily, "is not straightened by such arbitrary lines as those of race and country. 'Count von Merode-Neustadt,' he said to me just before I left, 'I cannot bear to see these brave Frenchmen die.' That's chiefly the reason why I have come."

"It is very noble of both of you."

"We throw in a slice of the provinces simply to sweeten future intercourse."

This return to business set the other high contracting party once more groaning.

"Really I don't know what to say. I am quite certain I ought not to listen to you. What will people think in Paris, if I return without the provinces?"

"In Berlin," Merode retorted, "people don't think; they are not allowed to."

"Oh, yes, that's all very fine; but we can't do those things with us. The French are a free people."

"Sire, so are my countrymen."

"Yes, yes, I know—only—only the thing is different. Your Emperor is eloquent, while I am—that is, he is allowed to make up his own speeches, and Carache makes mine. Then he is stronger than I am," Napoleon winced. "He can sit up half through the night writing newspaper leaders, at least so Godefroy says; whereas if I tried to do the same thing, I should be dead in a month. Heart disease, you know."

The Count assumed a look of great concern.

"Indeed! I am deeply grieved to hear it."

"Oh, it is inherited," the warrior went on, attempting to introduce a note of laughter into his shaking voice. "Most of these things are. My poor father, you know. He would have died of angina pectoris, only—"

"Only?"

"Only—only—he died of something else."

"Ah," Merode sighed, "I am sorry."

"So you see I have to spare myself. The doctor at Harrow used to declare that a sudden 'Bo!' would be enough to send me into my grave."

For a minute or so the German looked sorely tempted to have a try; but he kept resolutely to his whiskers, saying presently:

"This war can't be good for you."

"It is n't," Napoleon assented. "I have n't been able to sleep a wink all day for the sound of that infernal cannon."

"You can hear it even at this distance?" inquired the guileless envoy.

"Certainly I can. We are not more than twenty miles from Parfondrupt."

"I should have thought it more."

"Oh, dear, no," maintained his Majesty, much hurt; "I have measured it on one of Mesnil's maps."

"You doubtless know best. Sire, you have recalled to my mind the memory of that blood-stained field. Behold, I shudder!"

"The thought of it frightens me as much as it does you. But, unhappily, these things are necessary."

"You and I can stop them."

Napoleon's face was already puckered in anxious folds. He now began to sway his body to and fro in an agony of doubt. He dared not accept, equally he dared not refuse, so he swayed to and fro. Before long he muttered:

"Let me hear exactly what you offer?"

"Lower Alsace, and the piece of Lorraine southwest of Moyenvic and the canal. Observe," Merode whipt out a pocket-atlas from his cuirass, and drew his chair up to the table,— "the two pieces together form a compact and convenient wedge, should you desire hereafter to avenge yourself for Mesnil's blunders."

"What *am* I to say?" murmured Bonaparte. "It certainly looks very compact." He likewise was now up to the table. Merode pushed the atlas under his nose, and left the matter to simmer for a while.

"Monsieur Prehlen," said he, in a conversational aside, like a tutor who permits his pupil a break in the midst of Latin prose, "has given great offence to his government. I have it on the best authority that he has

already been recalled. Heigho, how we shall miss him in Paris. What an amusing dog he was."

The bait took instantly; though Napoleon saw the hook, and, with it in his mouth, vowed mentally he would not be caught.

"I think you must be wrong."

"No, the thing is beyond the region of possible doubt. I have it from our Russian at Berlin. Prehlen exceeded his instructions in his treaty with you. Have n't they repudiated some of the terms yet?"

"No," the Emperor replied with increasing nervousness.

"Ah, they will. Probably the Russian government has written direct to Carache. He would naturally keep bad news from you."

"Let him dare—"

"Sire, no sudden bursts of rage, I beg. Remember your heart. Talking of Carache, would you summon him from Paris, and agree to an armistice to cover his arrival?"

"Why?" His Majesty had now become very fierce and uncompromising: this fresh instance of his Premier's officiousness and treachery worked miracles in Merode's favour. Luckily for the latter, his fellow-negotiator could always be satisfied with the flimsiest evidence.

"My master suggested that you might not like to assume any of the responsibility yourself. He and Carache would put the thing through in a quarter of an hour."

"Be good enough to inform your master that I can do exactly the same in my country as he can in his, and no more and no less. Carache is merely my servant."

"Then accept this compact little wedge," cried Merode, bringing his hand down with a bang on the open map.

"I mean to," shouted the other.

"That's a brave and independent ruler. My master and you must meet: you would be very fond of one another."

"But," Napoleon hesitated, beginning once more to



sway to and fro in his chair, "could n't you throw in Upper Alsace as well?"

"No, I am afraid I could not, much as I should love to oblige you. I'll tell you what I will do, though."

"Yes?"

"I will procure you the hand of her serene Highness the Princess Vera of Hesse-Cassel."

"Thanks, very much," Napoleon exclaimed with a sudden access of energy, "I am already engaged."

Merode pondered for a while. "Is there no part of the British Empire which would tempt you?" he asked at last. "Canada or Cape Colony, for instance? My master could manage the matter for you with the greatest ease. He has only to send a few telegrams, and the thing is as good as done."

The Monarch's reply to this tempting offer rather startled the envoy. He clapped both hands to his head and sprang to his feet, at the same time shouting:

"I accept, I accept. Quick, pen and paper!"

"Is it to be Cape Town?"

"No, no—what you offer in Alsace."

"Sire, I congratulate you on your sagacity. We most certainly should have smashed Mesnil the other side of Metz."

"Put the thing to paper at once," Bonaparte persisted, now fully ablaze with excitement, "else I shall assuredly go back upon my word. They will make me."

Merode rummaged inside his cuirass. "I have the preliminaries here."

"Quick, let me sign," shouted our hero, brandishing a quill, which, with a small bottle of ink, the Ambassador had also produced from his inexhaustible bosom. "I do not want it read—I trust you."

"One minute. I ought to inform your Majesty that this does not include any part of Lorraine in our restitution."

"Only Lower Alsace?"

"Only Lower Alsace."

"That's not fair. You offered me a strip of Lorraine southwest of Moyenvic and the canal, and I accepted it. I sha'n't sign."

"You must please yourself. After all, I am doing this mainly to oblige you. We Germans have nothing to fear from a continuance of the war. Italy and Austria have this very morning given us a renewal of the triple alliance. You will have Nice under water before the week is out."

"Lower Alsace, then," shrieked the bewildered monarch. "Where do I sign?—thanks, I see," and he scratched his signature with twitching hand.

Then he cast the quill to the floor. "Thank God for that!" he cried.

Merode stooped down to recover the little weapon:

"I have yet to sign. I shall put the pen away among my most treasured possessions."

Five hours later, and upon the stroke of midnight, General Mesnil burst into the farm. He was smothered in dust from head to foot; his eyes glittered with rage. Learning from Godefroy that the Emperor had long ago retired to rest, the excited little warrior sprang like a tiger up the stairs. Nothing could stop him. He gave one hurried tap at Napoleon's door, then pushed into the room. It was in darkness. The General could descry only the dim outlines of the bed; the canopy had assumed fearful proportions, it covered the whole ceiling.

"Godefroy," came a peevish voice from the black chasm of bedding, "what *do* you want? My heart is causing me fearful agony. Can't you let me die in peace?"

"It is not Godefroy," rapped out Mesnil.

"Oh," exclaimed the voice from the abyss, already a trifle more robust, "who is it, then?"

"It is I, General Mesnil."

"I can't see you now. You must wait till the morning."

"My message won't wait. I have come to tell you that you have betrayed France. Good dreams, my master."



Book III

“VOILA! ENCORE UNE DECEPTION”





## Chapter I

The victor of Parfondrupt got back to the Élysée as quickly as he could, having due regard to the just claims of the towns upon his route. Verdun, Chalons, Rheims, even little Château-Thierry, wanted a glimpse of their conquering hero. And he, conscious of both battles won simultaneously from his bedroom window, felt neither the desire nor the right to balk such legitimate curiosity. Nor did he altogether object to this part of the business. He "progressed" almost up to Paris itself. He made little speeches which did not omit—one may be sure—to accord their fair share of praise to his lieutenants—Clisserole especially, whom he persistently placed number two on the roll of honour. The reason may have had something to do with the fact that, one night at Rheims, Mesnil complimented him to his face as the "pacificator of La Grange-en-Haye." It also came to his ears that the little fellow went about saying how greatly he regretted his master's meagre practice at the English bar. His words at the farm he had forgotten. So he was right glad to find himself back once more in Paris. Even a palace grows its household gods. Napoleon (he might not have owned to it himself) always succumbed to the sway of familiar places. He liked to have his books and pictures around him, the desk he seldom sat at, and the sofa he used a good deal. He liked his usual mattress. Not that there was anything weak in that: Leonidas's self might have dreaded the multiplication of nights under the farm-house canopy. Above all he was able now to enjoy these things in the knowledge that they were amply deserved. He had put two victories between himself and Pimlico. And if, in men's eyes, he had ever resembled his famous progeni-

tor, the likeness was never greater than at this memorable period. Parallel pictures of the illustrious kinsmen filled front sheets even of journals which as a rule despised illustrations, and flooded shop windows wherein customarily you might look for anything rather than photographs. One enterprising trader, an Italian warehouseman in the Boulevard Malherbes, managed to get both monarchs onto the same surface. The device passed into instant favour. It enabled Parisians to note how much the present Emperor outstripped his ancestor in modesty of demeanour.

This modesty was an especial feature. Every one who caught a glimpse of Napoleon as he passed on his triumphal progress noted it; and every one who noted it was pleased. All things considered, it may not have been difficult to assume, but none the less it was extremely meritorious. It did not serve in any way to give undue prominence to the services of Marshal Mesnil, General Clisserole, or subordinate leaders, yet it created a favourable impression. Most of all, it helped to counteract the first low mutterings of discontent which came from those who held that Berlin ought to have been blotted out.

Unhappily, there were many such, Prince Felix among them. A letter of his, written from Auteuil about this time, was redirected by a paternal post-office to the Premier, who put it away among his most cherished possessions. It shows the kind fellow's view of the situation.

It invoked "My beloved Hadamard," whom it apprised of "our continued good health. Both Christina and I send you best wishes for the new year, though it is four months off. I, for one, sha'n't be sorry to bid this current Abomination good-bye. It has proved a poor friend to me. First, it places that wretched Capelli on the throne; secondly, it keeps him alive. My doctor, who meets him constantly about town, tells me that his death from delirium tremens is merely a matter of weeks. Yet he does n't die! Felix, pity me! At least I am prepared for any emergency. De Morin has promised to summon me at the first approach of dissolution; and, as you know, omnibuses pass this door every few minutes.

I say omnibuses advisedly; I cannot any longer afford even a fiacre. Christina has been compelled to sell the victoria which the young English milor gave us two winters ago. The theatres, you see, are empty, while English milors do not dare venture into this perturbed land. The dear child talks gloomily of returning to her convent in Malmö. Come to us, Felix, or we perish. Succour us of your moneybags, cherished Judas, or I lose the noblest friend Sweden ever gave mortal man. The canaries in the hall are dying for want of water. We can give them no food; we are compelled to turn them out to get their meat as best they can from richer neighbours. Two of them have already had a pleasant time with a strange cat. Felix, our need is such that I have been compelled to enter into a conspiracy to hasten Capelli's approaching end. General Changarnier is the pivot. He, it seems, owes Parchments a grudge for not giving him a bâton when Mesnil and Clisserole received theirs. He has got hold of a certain Senator Loog, whom I do not know, and your humble namesake. Join us, Hadamard! You and I are both Felix; let us put our fortunes on the same chance. We mean to approach Monsieur Nadez. He does these things very expeditiously, I understand; and I hear on all sides that his terms are moderate. Naturally, we shall leave the weapon to him; he has had experience. Personally, I prefer explosive bullets—they are so conclusive. Changarnier says knives. Loog—oh, he is merely a cipher, no one cares what he says. Christina suggests hemlock; but it is so deuced hard to administer. She calls! Do not forget to come to me, dear one. Farewell."

But Monsieur Carache preserved a discreet silence upon these unpleasant topics. And Majesty went blissfully forward in contented ignorance. He felt that he might now regard himself as secure in the saddle. He doubted whether the great Emperor, even after Ulm, had been more popular. Nevertheless he was glad enough when all the pageantry was over, and he and the Grand Chamberlain could once more resume their tranquil occupations.

"I think a few days in the country," he suggested to

this venerable relative directly the first chance offered, "may soothe my nerves."

"You have just come from the country. And people will expect you to remain in Paris."

"I only meant a day or two, to breathe the fresh air."

"The Villa Yvonne at Meaux," says De Morin bluntly, "has been converted into a home for convalescent officers. By his Majesty's orders, let me add."

"Oh."

"Moreover, the Earl and dear Henriette and their sweet children are proposing to spend the winter in Russia."

"Oh," repeated his Majesty.

The Chamberlain's communication—like so many of that genial gentleman's utterances—was intended as a nasty one. He delivered it with great deliberateness, then waited blandly for Napoleon to wince and flush crimson. He waited in vain, and began to think that the other had been studying his own imperturbable demeanour. He was, however, too keen a reader of the human countenance to be long deceived. The first faint look of surprise, followed instantly and obliterated by a nod of indifferent acquiescence, gave him full insight into the Imperial heart wherefrom all memory of Muriel was slowly passing. Maybe the spell was dead altogether. In any case it was no longer strong enough to make this ardent lover aught but coldly desirous of a fresh glimpse of her, who, but a month ago, had wholly filled such part of his universe as was not already occupied by the contemplation of his own magnificence.

So the Grand Chamberlain went upon his way rejoicing. He knew well enough that the Framlinghams never came to Paris. His brilliant manœuvre rendered it equally certain that his master would never return to Meaux. He chose, as a last string, to credit the rumour—given him by Carache—of the Earl's forthcoming visit to Russia. So the two young people would never meet again. Whenever his thoughts turned to the contemplation of this little piece of diplomacy, he hugged himself. Indeed, he became so elated, that he resolved to run

down to the Villa Yvonne and have a look at the maimed patriots who had proved such useful allies.

In Meaux itself these warriors had not been viewed quite so complacently. The inhabitants of that charming spot saw their town little by little assuming, under the third Empire, the position held by Compiègne under the second. Had not Majesty favoured the villa first among his many retreats? Had he not lingered there two out of the nine weeks which composed his reign? The war satisfactorily concluded, they looked for a period of gaiety that should fill their streets with guests and lackeys and gold. The authorities had already ordered plans for a private theatre, to be built in the villa grounds. They offered it as a mark of loyal esteem. Likewise in the hope that it might attract.

Picture, then, the dismay of every patriotic citizen when invalids burst into the sacred precincts as though they had come to stop. The entire community lashed itself into a fury. The chief drug-store threatened to boycott the invaders; but, luckily for its reputation, repented. The other tradesmen went in a body, tearful and indignant, to pray the Mayor's good offices. The Mayor consulted the Prefect; the Prefect sought Madame Verre. Madame Verre, after much weary meditation and sundry little furtive expeditions to view the invalids from behind a quickset hedge, came to the conclusion that they were merely acute, and that happy days would come again. This opinion was in due course communicated to the tradesmen, who thanked the Mayor and withdrew; while Madame flitted hither and thither, narrating to her friends how she had presided at the dawning of hope.

"My dear Henriette," she exclaimed to Lady Framlingham in the course of one of these visits, "you may be quite certain that Napoleon will not remain in Paris longer than he can help." It was the morning after "Grand day"; the two ladies were seated in the drawing-room of the Villa Henriette.

"No, most certainly he will not stay in Paris a moment after it is necessary," Madame went on. "There is the meeting of the Legislative Assembly to-day, and



the review on Friday. Mark my word, he will leave the capital on Saturday!"—she leant forward with a show of great mystery.

"You ask, where will he go?" Madame paused for a reply. The Countess, however, contented herself with a nod of infinite wisdom.

"Where will he go?" insisted Madame. "Not to Cannes, surely. Brittany is too cold. Compiègne he dare not revive. He loathes Fontainebleau, I have it as a fact."

"The Château d'Urville?" Henriette suggested faintly.

Madame shut her eyes tight. "It would be in shameful taste. No, Meaux alone is possible. Remember my words, dear Henriette, the Emperor will sleep here on Saturday."

"And the convalescents?"

"The convalescents," the other rejoined, now going quite blind, "will return to their homes. Twelve were despatched yesterday; my coachman met them on their way to the station. Six alone remain; and of these, two looked so ill when I last saw them, that I expect they are already dead. The other four, if worst came to the worst, might be billeted over the neighbourhood. I have calculated the whole thing out from end to end. Monsieur Verre says I am wrong. I say I am right. We have been friends now so long, dear Henriette, you won't mind my adding that Verre is a perfect fool."

"Not at all," murmured Lady Framlingham languidly, like the high-born English lady she was; "not in the least." Next minute she had left repose, and dashed off into a violent diatribe against England in general and one Englishman in particular.

"Why should he want to leave Paris just as the winter season is commencing? You must be wrong, dear Louise; I feel convinced of it. The Emperor is not a fool. Why should he disappear at a time when every one is thinking of him; applauding his conquests, and madly craning forward to catch a glimpse of his face? No, no, a thousand times no! He will lead Paris this winter; there will be balls at the Élysée, concerts and dinner-

parties. All the world will be there, save our wretched selves. Poor me! my fate is a miserable time at that soaking Tipton-St.-John! Fugh, the place has a name like a cannibal island! Ah, Louise, you were wise not to marry out of your own country."

At dinner, that same evening, my lady renewed her lamentation. It was a family gathering of so select a character that not more than eight persons were present. Nicholas Fersen counted one, and he was the only stranger. My lady's audience included her brother, and her brother's little boy, and all her children. She addressed her grievances to everyone in turn, except her husband, for whom they were principally intended.

The Earl sat facing his consort, watching her gesticulations, and wondering how in the world he had ever come to marry her. And his look—one regrets to have to confess it—contained the merest touch of direct repulsion towards his helpmeet of twenty-seven years. Her volatility shocked him, as it never failed to do; while her assumption of repose—the quality of all which he valued most highly—struck him as more odious to-night than ever before. Our men at Ulundi, who saw the enemy in their dead comrades' clothes, must have had much the same feeling. Madame, on her side, never repaid his attention by so much as a momentary glance. Her quick-moving eyes scrutinized every one and every thing the room contained, but they always avoided her husband's face. Maybe they were so very restless because of this one corner of forbidden ground.

Lord Mendril, more than ever like his mother, now that he was beside her, enclosed my lady between himself and the Honourable Charles. The two young men did not pay much heed to their voluble relative. They were discussing the end of the cricket season, and the Countess hated cricket almost as cordially as she detested England. Uncle Louis, on the other side of Charles, threw in an occasional remark. He did not share in his sister's antipathy, but then he knew about as much of the game as he did of the Grand Monarch. The farther end of the table was far more subdued. Lord Framlingham's engrossing occupation has received

its mention; Count Fersen's probably needs none. Little Paul de Murinac was busy with the one consuming thought that to-morrow night would see him inside the sacred portals; his cousin, Muriel, sat equally silent before the prospect of her approaching return home.

Was she sorry?—really she hardly knew. Since Napoleon's departure her fancy had been just as busy as before with crowns imperial and bee bespangled robes. But she would not scheme, she could not scheme, to get them. She preferred, rather, to leave herself passive in the hands of fate—or of her mother. She intended so to leave herself, and her only contribution would be to dream, to dream, to dream. She knew his love; she had no notion that it only needed a fortnight to evaporate. She knew, too, that the war was mostly of her making. Curious as it may seem, she did not at all connect herself with the slaughter. If she had, probably it would not have frozen her blood. Nothing is really of any importance in this world. Any one who chooses to become, say, a parricide can find out so much for himself. Dear reader, you won't talk any more nonsense about "sinking into the earth" once you have had your first half-hour in the dock. In a single sentence, the young lady flung away rudder and compass at a time when she wanted them most of all.

"Paul," cried his aunt, bursting through the County Averages that cut her off from the lower end of the table,—“Paul, you are very silent. Muriel, amuse the little one.”

“I do not know why you should be so silent,” she went on, not noticing that Muriel made no visible effort to obey her. “I only wish I were going to winter in Paris. Muriel, you agree with me?”

Muriel did not answer.

“I suppose you will remain there a week or so?” asked the Earl of his brother-in-law. It was the nearest he and Madame usually got to direct conversation.

Louis straightened himself. “I return to Avize to-morrow night,” and he closed his mouth with a decisive click. He was thinking of that brand-new scheme reposing in his desk at home, and wherein it was laid

down that he should actually, and for the last time, commence "the new mode" of life on the evening of September 10, 189-.

"You will change your mind when you get there," said his sister maliciously.

"Pardon me, Henriette. Pray, allow me to know my own business best. I shall spend but a few hours in Paris—in fact, merely long enough to buy Paul some things, and introduce him to Monsieur de Morin."

"How absurd! You and your good wife might just as well pass the winter there. What is there to keep you at Avize? Of course, you will say you prefer the country. Well, in my humble opinion, you ought to sacrifice yourself *sometimes*"—with a savage look at the chandelier—"for the sake of your family."

"Nothing to keep me at home?" he cried, full of indignation; "dearest Henriette, surely you forget how busy I shall be throughout the entire winter. I can barely spare these few days."

"Dearest Henriette," however, remained unconvinced.

"What can you find to make you busy?"

"Plenty of things," he retorted, with a pompous defiance. "In the first place we are trying a new manure for the cucumbers. Then there is my history."

"Oh, your history! I had forgotten that," exclaimed Madame, indulging, at the same time, in a malignant little simper. "I should have thought that Paris was far the most convenient spot for writing in. You have no libraries at Avize."

"I buy my books," and Louis could not be got to say another word about his magnum opus.

"Henriette," her husband said coldly, addressing De Murinac, "does not understand country life. She is not fond of Tipton-St.-John."

"No, indeed I am not," she answered on her side, looking at Walter; "it is damp, and dull, and disagreeable. As children, I remember, we used to complain bitterly of Avize. It is paradise to Tipton."

The two young men left Grace and the Somersetshire brethren who played in top-hats and frock-coats at a

county match,—an incident which all cricketers worthy of the name seem to have on the brain,—and listened. The Honourable Charles got him ready to help my lady, while Walter prepared to keep the peace.

"Tipton!" resumed their mother, in tones of deep contempt that grew shriller by degrees; "the only thing that makes the place endurable is the Convent Chapel at Sidmouth. Oh, Nicholas, you do not know how I appreciate that one blessing."

"I am sure I wish you were coming to Paris instead," the young Russian answered, his eyes where they always were in Muriel's presence.

My lady's reference to her religion at this early stage in the game showed what amount of hope she had in achieving success. Curiously, it was not followed by the expected outburst.

The Earl's sole reply was to smile across at Muriel. "We have been in France long enough. My little girl wanted to spend an extra week here, and we have done as she desired. But the fortnight is up, and she is as eager as I am to get home. Is it not so, dearest?"

She smiled back at him, but she did not trust herself to speak. Her silence evidently came as a surprise.

"Why, Muriel, you surely do not want to go to Paris?"

She did not answer. Nicholas Fersen flushed with pleasure. He fancied that he could read her meaning; he began to see victory within his grasp.

"Always Muriel," the Countess put in, looking savagely at Louis's beard. "Why should I never be considered? I am your wife. I say I am treated cruelly. Winter after winter I am dragged off to that abominable Tipton, while my house in the Avenue de Villiers, the house which came to me from my father, through my dear dead brother, is suffered to rot away, a scandal to our name. Louis, you may purchase the house."

"Thank you, sister; I have no uses for it."

"I agree with mother," added the Honourable Charles. "Paris will be very lively this winter, and we shall be asked everywhere. And as I *am* to go into the service, I think some regard ought to be paid to my interests in the matter."



"At your age, my son," said the father, with a grave wisdom which caused the Honourable Charles unspeakable annoyance, "I did n't think of my interests."

The abruptly ended embassy and the viceroyship muddled away pulled at the young man's tongue. He had grace enough to stop short at a mumbled whisper.

"During my whole married life I have only spent about fifteen weeks in Paris. One of those, moreover, was on my honeymoon." She got no nearer to the blighted mission.

"But, mother, what do you propose?" asked her eldest son suavely.

"Ask your father; he knows well enough," she replied, glaring at Louis.

"What your mother wants is that we should close Mendril Court and live in Paris half the year."

"Nothing of the kind," she retorted with extreme heat, this time giving him a look which ought by rights to have killed him; "it is a monstrous falsehood."

"Then, what *do* you want?"

"What do I want, indeed! You know well enough. Pray, spare me that assumption of ignorance. It is very correct, no doubt; but it annoys me."

"Really," muttered my Lord under his breath, "your manners are atrocious."

Walter interposed.

"Mother would be quite content with three months in Paris."

"Three months are better than nothing," she grumbled.

"What does my little girl say?" the Earl asked, softening. "I know she wants to get back to Mendril."

But even yet she could not find her tongue. The father's mouth hardened. He bent over his plate in silence. Then, dropping his fork and spoon with a clatter, he shook himself free from the table, and flung out of the room. It was among his little habits, and it accounted for his unpopularity.

But on the lawn afterwards, whither Muriel and Fersen alone, of all the rest, had gone to tempt the autumn evening, he approached them with softened face.



Nicholas had just that moment asked a familiar question, and Muriel had given a familiar and unsatisfactory answer; and neither of the young people was looking over-pleased.

"Sir," the Russian burst out, as Framlingham fell in line with them and took his daughter's arm, "I am trying to persuade Muriel to come to St. Petersburg this winter."

"The Earl laughed. "Oh, you have got farther than Paris now!" said he. "And what about Muriel's poor old father?"

"I mean the two of you, sir. I am going in November: I will take charge of you."

"I daresay you will, you young diplomatist. One thing at a time, though," and he turned lovingly to his daughter. "Does my little girl really think she would like to spend the winter in Paris?"

"It will be a change, father," she managed to murmur.

"Then she shall have the change."

"Come to Petersburg," pleaded Fersen. "It's every bit as gay; and not so common."

"You egotist," laughed my lord. "How long are you away?"

"Till the end of the year," the boy muttered ruefully. "You won't be persuaded to come? My mother will make you very welcome. She has never seen Muriel."

"Another year, Nicholas."

"It is always that."

"Come, my little girl."

With her arm still linked in his he led her into the centre of the drawing-room, Fersen following.

"Very well, then," he exclaimed aloud, "since my little daughter wishes it, we will spend the next few months in Paris."

Madame clapped her hands with joy. She even ventured to pat her husband's disengaged arm, an attention which he did not relish.

"How sweet of you, dear Walter," she cried. "I will write to Marie to-night." It was not long, however,

before she called to mind her husband's manner of conferring this boon. By bedtime she discovered that she disliked him as much as ever. As for Muriel, her sole response to her father's kindness was the cold remark that he was mistaken if he fancied she pined for Paris. And, as a fact, she did not—now that the boon had been granted.

## Chapter II

For the next few days De Morin was busy—very busy, but also very cheerful. The storm and stress of the Revenge had terminated happily; the Empire, which he had, so to speak, refounded, seemed firmly set upon its feet; and it now remained to make it socially successful. This was his department, and he approached it with all the vigour of a youth of fifty. His office table groaned under lists classifying men according to their quality, marking off some as worthy to be dined or danced, or both, and others as only to be received in herds and regaled on sandwiches and lemonade. It was an arduous undertaking, but none the less enjoyable. For the Chamberlain knew well that no man, save perhaps a judge on gaol delivery, had greater power than himself to inflict pain and annoyance on so many virtuous people. Then, his experience gained as Vice-Chamberlain under the second Empire materially lightened his task. He refreshed his memories of that gilded time, determined, if he could, to revive its Catholic invitation lists. And he rubbed his hands as he bethought him how he would gather all Paris, all France, into his net; how that there should not be a villa at Neuilly, a retired family house at Versailles, which did not in some form or other bend beneath his sway.

Yes, it was to be a period of widespread gaiety. He would show the insolent Carache, the enigmatical Mesnil, the dull, well-meaning Brisson, their limitations. Not one of them had any real power to popularize the new order; it needed his own department to do that.

So Monsieur de Morin was busy and cheerful. And when in course of time the Framlingham family came up for consideration, he placed them on the most exalted

list with the greatest pleasure in life. It was a privilege thus to be able to humour his master without doing any real damage. He knew all about the abandoned town house and my lady's woes; and he felt deep sorrow not to be able to grieve as he should do for these miseries of his dearest and best friend. For, after much pondering, he had come to the conclusion that a Bonaparte-Mendril marriage was not desirable. To be sure, it was after very much pondering indeed; and the conclusion, when arrived at, did not show an imposing front. The reasons on one side and the other were so equally balanced that to decide meant the deepest searchings of heart.

It certainly would strengthen his own position to have Muriel Mendril, the grand-daughter of his bosom friend, now dead, upon the throne. But then, what profit to strengthen his own position at the cost of weakening the Empire? That that must fall about was beyond question. The upper classes would be consumed by jealousy, while the whole nation would rise in protest against an English alliance, even though the bride had been a member of the ruling family. Again, there was another objection. Napoleon needed the strength of kinship with some sovereign house. Why, on "Grand Day" itself, Monsieur Oscar Prehlen had taken the Count into a convenient corner and hinted at a Russian princess, whose name he did not specify, but whose face he declared to be a dream.

But the Grand Chamberlain had also private reasons. Strange as it may seem, there lurked one soft spot in his heart; and it was the growth of many a solitary hour—to wit, the memory of his old friend Gustave de Murinac, that fiery whirlwind of a fellow, who, having walked with him as a brother for wellnigh twenty years, had disappeared one day in a blaze of lurid flame. He could not commit the chances of the poor child's happiness to Napoleon's tender mercies. With King Arthur for her consort, her life would be bounded on all sides by trouble. And De Morin knew his master: thrice unhappy the woman who had to lean on him. But to resume. Our old friend placed the Framlinghams on the most exalted list, humming a cheerful little air as he

did so. It brought a smile to his face to think of the Imperial mandate left unopened, and to rot upon some dust-laden kitchen table among the basement cobwebs.

One afternoon occasion took him into the neighbourhood of the Avenue de Villiers. He had business with Marshal Mesnil, who lived in the Rue Legendre. The business done, he could not deny himself the pleasure—he never could—of having a look at number forty-seven, and recalling those days that were as dear as they were long departed. It was quite six weeks since his last visit, accordingly he came back to it with all the delight of a hungry heart.

Alas, a first glance showed him that it was about to pass into the hands of the alien and the stranger. They were actually painting the façade, that dear old yellow façade which had been filthy in Gustave's time. Yes, they were painting the façade, and papering the walls—he could see as much through the windows—and white-washing the ceiling, obliterating the stains which he had made with Gustave's regalias. So it was to pass at last. Others would surround the board at which his dead friend had shouted and roared and bellowed and drunk. Children's voices would once more break the silence which had held sway for twenty years. Ah me! he thought, how vain and fleeting were all human things. Folks, especially very old ones, tried to make time lag by hanging tender memories round rustic stiles and bricks and mortar and river banks, forgetting that they themselves were part of the procession, and that what they mourned as so long departed was really only a very little way in front. But, but—and he came to the present tense and the first person in his very present misery—the rush of life shows us our folly. Strangers burst into our silent rooms. They fling open the windows, fugh! with harsh voices that chide our sacred dust. Relentlessly they cleanse them of their damp and—and of our sweet regrets which have dwelt in them so long.

These pleasing reflections carried him well on his backward way. Crossing the Palace courtyard, he

stumbled upon Paul de Murinac, who, on his side, was hastening to meet his good-natured Aunt Henriette at the Gare de L'Est.

"My poor little Paul," said the venerable Chamberlain, with his smile of tender melancholy, and a gentle hand upon the crown of the lad's hat, "my poor little Paul, they have sold your dear grandfather's house in the Avenue de Villiers."

Paul stared at him.

"But, Monsieur, it has been sold many years. My aunt Henriette bought it from the executors before I was born."

"I know, I know. Child, what I mean is, your aunt has just sold it."

The look of perplexity deepened upon the boy's face.

"But Monsieur," he repeated hopelessly, "my aunt and uncle are coming to live in it themselves. My aunt is to be in town this morning, to see about some furniture. I am to meet her at the railway station and to lunch with her," and perceiving that the Chamberlain's only answer was an impatient gesture, as of dismissal, Paul started off once more on his way to meet his good-natured aunt Henriette at the Gare de L'Est.

De Morin went back to his lists, and to a disconsolate survey of the Framlingham entry. His old friend Henriette had not treated him quite fairly in this matter. She had assured him on several occasions that she never obtained a single day in Paris from one year's end to another. He felt disappointed in her; it was not grateful, considering how good he had been to all of them in bygone days; how frequently he had suffered them to proclaim his apartment in a state of siege. But the mandates had gone forth and left him powerless. In any case he could not have drawn back now. Old days forbade.

He took comfort in the thought that the danger was not so very threatening. He fancied—and not without due cause—that he knew his master by now and his master's little ways. He considered the latter's shallow heart, his weak and yielding nature. And he made no doubt that with a *little* skilful handling, not to mention



one or two hours by the way, he would get him past his dearest Muriel, and land him in Monsieur Prehlen's capacious net. The girl and her mother might live to thank him. So he suffered in silence, and bore Henriette's invitations with fair equanimity. He received a good many; for my lady possessed a warm heart: she soon promoted him to the position of long-lost parental uncle. The Earl and Countess and two of their children came to the first grand reception of the season. Napoleon welcomed them with marked distinction. He bestowed a smile for the two scions of the house to divide between them. And while he smiled, not a trace of colour came into his sallow face. Muriel was curtsying low at the moment, consequently De Morin could not see how she took her half.

The Earl and Countess and two of their children came to the second grand reception of the season. The whole previous formula was repeated; only Lord Mendril merely got a quarter this time. Then they came to a dance, and Bonaparte danced half a dance with the Countess, but made no attempt to get the other half with her daughter.

Then they were invited to dine. After dinner, the Emperor exchanged a dozen words with Lord Framlingham, and succeeding in making—for the first time in De Morin's view—a polite remark to Muriel, who was standing beside her father.

And the Count, who always kept lynx-eyes upon them whenever they came into the same orbit of vision, grew daily more calmly confident. It simplified matters very much to have to deal with a master who was weak enough to like to toy with temptation, and not deep enough to hold a lasting passion.

But upon a certain evening—the night of another ball at the Élysée, whereat the Emperor had also danced half a dance with Lady Framlingham—there came a slight rebuff. De Morin was standing some few paces off his master, as usual watching him and wondering whether the Meaux affair had not been, after all, a figment of Brisson's brain. Suddenly the grey eyes, which smiled without sweetness, and wandered restlessly over

everything without observing anything, became fixed. A spasm of pain shot across the mobile face. De Morin wheeled sharply. Yes, there at the farther end of a smaller chamber stood Muriel; she was in the act of exchanging her brother's arm for Count Fersen's, and Lord Mendril seemed content with the exchange.

What a handsome pair they made. Napoleon's look of anguish flashed a brilliant idea into the old fellow's brain. It seemed a way out of all difficulties. He broached it gingerly to Henriette the next time he found himself at number forty-seven. She, however, did not let him get beyond his first sentence; declaring that he was an old match-maker, and that no child of hers should ever become a Muscovite,—no, not to be Empress of Russia. Then she proceeded to ask him, with fascinating archness, whether it was really true that Napoleon intended to revive the glories of Compiègne.

“When sorrows come.” The Chamberlain returned to the palace from Lady Framlingham's to find Godefroy wandering about his official suite like an afflicted soul. The valet unfolded a woeful tale. Within three short weeks of “Grand Day,” and but fourteen days of their second meeting, this great Conqueror—Godefroy wheezed and blinked more than ever—was once again prostrate at the feet of Muriel Mendril. And this time the disease had him tight within its grasp. Another little war might free him—nothing less would. He sat for hours in his library, without stirring hand or foot, listless and lovelorn, waiting for the dragging hours to bring him to another of those meetings, which gave him half a dozen unsatisfactory glimpses, and a fresh lease of his heartache. It was pitiable to behold Cæsar thus in chains. It seemed an accursed mischance that brought the girl a second time across his path. Innocent or not, ignorant of this passion, or fully conscious, she was bound to be its victim. Godefroy felt anxious to save her, but of course he had most at heart to heal his master and restore that atmosphere of complacent industry which should pervade all well-conducted palaces. At present the business of state, so far as it came under Napoleon, lay totally neglected. Despatches were

placed before him at nine of mornings, for him to read and sign: they were removed at one, unsigned, unread. Public ceremonies were scamped in a manner calculated to destroy all reverence for the throne. Carache grumbled. Marshal Brisson grumbled. Marshal Mesnil grumbled—no, he did something else; and, really, Godefroy dared not blame him. The two warriors were busy with garrisons for Lower Alsace. Many points could not be so much as discussed between them without first advising with his Majesty. And Napoleon, barricaded in his library, reclining upon the sofa that lent itself most to the abandoned condition of his mind, and gazing blankly at the portion of his laden book-shelves which might be said to cover the Avenue de Villiers, would not be advised with. When they did penetrate into the Presence, they met with no success. His powers of application were at the lowest ebb compatible with sanity; consequently he left them to settle their point according to their liking. The only tangible result was a sharp reprimand for Godefroy from both sides.

The valet wound up his story with a bitter complaint. The Chamberlain might not be prepared to end this infatuation, said he, for the sake of his master; nor, perhaps, for the sake of the young lady; nor of the business of the country. Very well, then, he must implore him to stop it for his sake—his, Godefroy's; for stop it must, if Napoleon was to retain one of the most devoted of body-servants monarch ever had.

The Chamberlain replied that he was only too anxious to do all he could to terminate this unhappy madness; but that he was not God, to interfere with the human heart. Neither was he a powerful body-servant, but merely a poor Grand Chamberlain whose main function lay in watching that the guests did not misappropriate the forks at Imperial receptions. And he bowed him out of his presence.

Godefroy withdrew in a condition of sombre astonishment. He had not looked for such curt treatment; it convinced him that his hours as personal attendant upon royalty were slipping to their end.

But, in reality, his words had sunk deep into De Morin's

heart. Nor were they allowed time to lose their sting. Thirty-eight hours after this last warning, came step number three in the sad process of disillusionment.

It dealt with Compiègne. On this occasion, also, the Chamberlain was returning home after an afternoon visit—this time to the Rue de Grenelle. The Russian Ambassador had been very cheerful and communicative, telling him a great deal about his Aunt Otilia and his departed parents, and something about the Russian marriage. He might not yet disclose her identity, but he assured De Morin that the Princess's face was a dream of loveliness. The Chamberlain made his way to his rooms, with these things heavy on his mind, and in the course of his journey came across his august master.

The Count stood respectfully to one side. Napoleon stretched out his arm and drew him gently along toward his own apartment. Upon their way they passed a group of pages lounging before a blazing fire, who sprang to their feet directly these great ones came in sight, not a little ashamed of their lazy attitudes.

"So, young gentlemen," the Emperor said gravely, stopping to survey them with all the majestic deliberation of a certain well-known head master, "you waste your time in front of fires on a beautiful afternoon like this?" His eyes lit upon Paul de Murinac. The boy held a book in his hand. He had not been lounging with the rest; and he gazed boldly at his master, thinking how fine and noble the latter looked, and what a privilege it would be to die for him upon the field of battle. His three companions continued to hang their heads.

"We are on duty, sire," stammered the elder of them.

"That is no excuse for idleness. Why do you not read, like your comrade yonder? What is the book, my lad?"

Paul handed it up without the least embarrassment. It proved to be one of those shilling productions, at that time flooding Paris, which purported to give a faithful account of the late campaign. Napoleon laughed when he saw the title-page.

"You are an Imperialist, that is quite clear."

The boy blushed. How genial this great Emperor was, and, withal, how penetrating thus to discover who were the devoted hearts in his service. Napoleon had handed the book to De Morin, who now restored it to its owner without comment.

"You are a brave little fellow, and I like to think that France holds many such as you." Majesty spoke in a louder voice than before, and with something of an aggressive touch, as it seemed to his faithful servant. He bestowed a stern look on Paul's companions, and swept on his way, leaving the Chamberlain to follow at his pleasure. In the library, Napoleon sat down straightway at his papers. He elaborately forgot the other's existence. It was an ugly sight,—the servant, bent with years, waiting the pleasure of a master perhaps a third his age. To do our hero justice, it was not a sight his inclinations would ordinarily have tolerated. But his uncle's behaviour over that book had touched him in a tender spot. His future happiness, if nothing else, called for some token of resentment.

"His Majesty will forgive me if I am seated," De Morin presently exclaimed, sinking gratefully into a chair; "I am an old man."

"My dear friend," Bonaparte rejoined—he employed a grave manner hardly in keeping with his cordial words—"my dear friend, what a question! You entered so quietly, I did not know that you were there."

"I understood that your Majesty desired to speak with me."

"No—and yet, now that you are here—" Napoleon subsided into a fit of gloomy abstraction.

"You desire my opinion about Alsace-Lorraine?" De Morin suggested.

"Why?—are not Mesnil and Brisson enough?"

"You wish to confer with me concerning a change of ministers?"

"My word, you are in a very presumptuous mood to-night. I want to consult you about nothing more important than Compiègne."



The Chamberlain indulged in a respectful little sigh of grateful relief.

"Do you remember Compiègne?"

"Certainly I do. The Emperor forgets that I was in the service of his august cousin."

"Tell me something about it."

"Compiègne is a small town situated at the edge—"

"No, no. About the life that was lived there in my cousin's time."

"Ah, sire, you push my memory hard."

"Surely no eyewitness can ever forget the glories of those days?"

"At the time, I do not think any of us treated them as such. I remember we used to eat and drink a good deal."

"Historians have so described them."

"You refer to the journalists who used to visit there. Journalists always speak of 'glories' where there is plenty to eat and drink."

The Emperor took a new line. "Is the place still habitable?" he asked. The question caught De Morin off his guard.

"The court could move there to-morrow."

"Ah, uncle, I am very miserable," with a burst of melancholy, which showed how pleased he was to get this answer.

"Nephew, it goes to my heart to hear you say so."

"And the grounds," Bonaparte went on, still plunged in gloom, "are they in a satisfactory condition?"

"They ought to be. Men are paid to keep the place in order."

"Then why should we not revive the eating and drinking?"

"The expense."

"Surely they will not grudge me that!" His petulance might have been born and bred in the purple. "I have won them back the provinces—ahem, Lower Alsace."

"But—"

"There are no buts. Recollect how useful these gatherings were to the late Emperor."



Napoleon was already busy with his engagement book. "Yes," he said before long, "the fourth Saturday in October. On that date, my dear De Morin, we will resurrect the glories of Compiègne."

"As you please. I will note your Majesty's commands. Whom would you desire to meet?"

"Oh, you can see to that,"—supremely indifferent.

"Good, I will see to it," and the Chamberlain promptly snapped *his* engagement-book and returned it to his waistcoat pocket. And without another word, he rose from his chair and walked leisurely towards the door.

"De Morin."

"Sire?"

"Spare me a few moments longer. I have more to say to you."

"My time is always at my master's disposal."

"Be seated, then,—no, not so far off; come nearer."

The Chamberlain came nearer.

"De Morin."

"Sire?"

"Oh, De Morin, I am very unhappy."

"You have said so. I am grieved to hear it."

"I have no one in whom I can confide, no one."

"It is the penalty of your position."

The Emperor was striding up and down the room. He stopped short in his perambulations, and tapped nervously upon the ground.

"Count de Morin."

"Your Majesty?"

"Concerning Compiègne: have you settled upon the guests?"

"I think the first party should be more or less military. We might have Mesnil, and Brisson, and Clisserole; the General is just leaving for Strasburg,—it will be a delicate compliment."

"But, dear friend, we must have another element, else it will be all war, and nothing else. Bring Carache. And you might have an ambassador or so. Lord Threpps, for choice; the English take less amusing."

There ensued a chilly silence; the Chamberlain's

note-book was open upon his knee, but beyond that he gave his master no assistance. The latter had to fight the thing out single-handed.

"Let me see," Bonaparte mused deeply, "we had better have Lord Framlingham to keep his countryman company."

"Lord and Lady Framlingham?"

"Yes, and their eldest son, of course, and their daughter—in the usual way," the young man responded gruffly.

The Chamberlain laid aside his note-book; he had grown suddenly tender and full of pity.

"Will it not serve to render you the more unhappy?"

"You think it will always be impossible?"

"Quite impossible."

"Please, *please* include them. If it is impossible, no harm can come."

An afternoon in mid-October; the north wind fled along the Avenue de Villiers in gusts that moaned as they stirred the rotting leaves. The lamps flickered in the grey twilight, without, however, helping to dispel the pervading gloom. It wanted the glow of the central boulevards to do *that*. Most men seemed to think so too; the thoroughfare was deserted, save for a sombre file of carriages outside number forty-seven.

Number forty-seven! What a change had come to it during the last few weeks. For years it had stood empty and neglected, without so much as a single caretaker to mitigate its loneliness. The neighbouring landlords were wont to complain bitterly of its begrimed façade and filthy windows; of its front door, from off which the paint had been ruthlessly burnt and blistered. It grew to be known as a scandal to Paris, the most beautiful of cities; as a reproach to Albion, the most perverse of nations. Was it to be endured that a haughty English noble should engird himself (and the key) within the walls of his castle and leave this terrible eyesore to depopulate a fashionable suburb? No! a thousand times no! *goddam!* So the landlords, concerting, flung down the gage of battle. They were ignominiously beaten in

the court of first instance. They appealed. While their appeal was pending, indeed only a fortnight before the case came on for trial, number forty-seven was suddenly thrown open to an invading horde of painters and cleaners and upholsterers, and the house was purged of its offending from top to toe. A few short days, and the front could vie for whiteness with any the street contained. The glistening windows gave out that faint shade of purple only to be found in glass of the most aristocratic kind. The door shone with green. The neighbouring landlords forgave and forgot. Most of them were wealthy shop-keepers, so their advances took the form of trade circulars. Nor was their generosity undeserved. My lord and my lady made up for past years. They gave balls and dinners and afternoon receptions, and their threshold admitted all that was best in Paris. They were, moreover, intimate at the Élysée. Indeed, men whispered that the only daughter, Lady Muriel, was making some impression on the Imperial heart.

Madame was holding one of her receptions upon this afternoon in mid-October when the north wind fled along the Avenue de Villiers in gusts that moaned as they stirred the rotting leaves.

Slowly the twilight darkened. Every minute the street lamps became more useful, though not more cheering. The sombre file of carriages began to sparkle.

The great door of forty-seven was flung open. It let forth the Russian Ambassador and the Count de Morin, both enveloped in a blaze of light. These eminent persons stood for a brief period on the doorstep. Monsieur Prehlen surveyed the shrouded sky with a certain anxiousness, while the Grand Chamberlain gazed serenely into space, waiting for his companion to lead the way.

"Shall we drive?" asked the Ambassador, using a tenderness which seemed to take into account De Morin's venerable age.

"By all means."

Monsieur Prehlen turned to the footman. "Call the Count de Morin's carriage."

"Bless you," blithely, "my carriage is not here."

"Nor mine."

The footman drew back, an expression of poignant grief upon his face.

"Gentlemen, there are no cabs."

"Then we must walk. Come, Prehlen, you are a younger man than I am."

"So you are meaning to revive the glories of Compiègne?" the Norwegian began, when they had got some little way.

"I have to make the attempt."

"The Grand Chamberlain can never fail."

"You flatter me," with a deprecatory gesture.

"An impossibility. The other day, in writing to my Aunt Ottilia, I mentioned that the Emperor lived in an atmosphere of flattery; that the Marshals lived in an atmosphere of flattery; that the Premier lived in an atmosphere of flattery; and that the only man whose virtues were of a kind to render flattery impossible was the only man—I forget the rest, but you can guess it."

"And what did your aunt say?"

"She has not answered."

The file which they had left before Madame's door was rapidly diminishing. Every now and then a carriage dashed past them to disappear into the grey. Prehlen followed it with sad eyes. "How I wish I was snug at home," he murmured more than once.

"Prehlen, you cunning dog, shall I tell you what it is you most desire at the present moment?"

His Excellency's gloom increased.

"What, you have pierced my front of forced cheerfulness? Then it is useless to dissemble. You have half my secret,—take all! I am suffering from an unmerited domestic affliction."

It was a curious thing how De Morin, so sleek and insinuating with everybody else, ever having some allotted task of destruction or circumvention before his eyes, and always moving towards it by means of innuendo and on his belly, became, by contrast with the Russian Ambassador, an open and hearty old gentleman. The wrinkles about his eyes smoothed themselves out. His voice lost its purring note: his happy smile, so eloquent of inward

calm, gathered greater directness and candour. He now looked at men—or rather at one man—not at inanimate objects, and at the present juncture his gaze was one of intense astonishment.

“Domestic affliction,” he murmured; “I did not know that it affected you in this way. Is your wife very outrageous?”

Prehlen gulped down a sob. “It’s not my wife. My accursed elder brother—”

The Chamberlain’s surprise widened into a grin.

“My dear Prehlen, what has your elder brother to do with Compiègne? You have drunk too much of that English ‘grog’; it *was* very nice.”

“Who spoke about Compiègne? You say you can read the great desire of my heart. Well, I desire before aught else to slay my brother—the Christiania ice merchant. This monster—as I learnt yesterday—has taken advantage of my prolonged absence to appropriate the whole of my dear dead mother’s estate, wherein we were to share and share alike. He has robbed me of fifteen thousand crowns—me, an orphan with a Muscovite wife! The villain! the black-hearted villain!”

It was more in sorrow than in anger. An “erring pearl” hung for a single instant upon either eyelid, then rolled slowly down each cheek, and disappeared into his beard.

But a diplomatist must not indulge in private woe. With a superhuman effort he mastered his sorrow, swallowing down a couple more sobs.

“You were speaking about Compiègne?” he recommenced softly.

“Ah, yes, Compiègne. My master will hope to see you there before the winter finishes.”

“I shall be overjoyed. I presume one need not bring one’s wife?”

“I will remember to omit her.”

“How curious,” resumed Prehlen, “to be back at dear old Compiègne. It was there that you and I first met. Count, you recollect? It must have been in ’67; I was low down the ladder in those days, while you—you had already gained some taste of your future emi-



nence. Dear, dear place, a fresh sight of it will bring tender memories."

"Let me see, how often were you there?"

"Only once," the Norwegian responded, with a cheerfulness that never faltered. "One visit always suffices me to sow pleasant memories."

"To me those memories are not so pleasant. I would to God that the house were suffered to moulder on in its solitude of thirty years. I hate it. I hate every memory that clings around its bedizened walls. I hate its very name. Monsieur Prehlen, you are a friend, with you I may speak frankly. This direct invitation to the world to compare us with the second Empire will not benefit us much in public estimation. Believe me, the comparison is already being made."

"In more particulars than one," murmured the Ambassador. De Morin took no notice, so the former came a step nearer.

"They are very successful," said he with a backward nod, which—seeing that they were already on the Quai des Tuileries—might have referred to any one or any thing.

De Morin took it to refer to the panorama in the Champs Élysées.

"Very. Only last week fifty thousand people passed through the turnstile. It is the battle of Manheulles, you know. Mesnil assures me that it is a capital representation.

"I meant the Framlinghams."

"I mistook. Yes, they are very successful. Madame resembles her father, old Gustave de Murinac, in more ways than one. He also was very fond of gaiety. In his time the house was always full. The late Emperor had a great affection for him."

They were crossing the Pont de Solferino. Prehlen drew his friend out of the stream of wayfarers towards the parapet, and the two men stood for a while silently facing the island spires.

"De Morin, do you remember our conversation of a fortnight back?"

"Certainly."



"Are not these Framlinghams in the way?"

"Your Excellency is a Northerner, you can stand the cold," shivered the old gentleman. "I cannot. And I want to get my dinner," and he recommenced walking.

"Where are you dining?"

"At Brisson's."

"Come to me instead. You can send him a note from my place."

"I dare not. His mother takes such things to heart. She is another old friend of mine, and I never get a chance of seeing her outside her own house."

"Why does she never go to the Élysée?"

"Oh, she lives a very retired life."

"They say she had an affair with Napoleon, before he gra— before the *coup d'état*."

"My God, man! she might be his great-grandmother."

"Well, she will keep. Dine with me, dear friend."

"Do not tempt me. They certainly do have very bad food," he added, by way of wistful afterthought.

"I will give you caviare, and a bottle of my very dry."

"They won't have caviare," murmured De Morin.

"And we will dine alone," urged the tempter. "My wife sha'n't be there."

"I'll write a note."

Accordingly, the Grand Chamberlain went to the Rue de Grenelle and wrote his note, which intimated, with many tears, that Madame and the Marshal would have to devour their fried soles, boiled mutton, and treacle pudding as best they could alone. Then the Ambassador summoned Michael to remove the Chamberlain's boots. And this operation successfully performed, he plied his aged guest with caviare and many other delicacy, and filled him with bucketfuls of the "very dry," and dragged him through the gamut of weird narratives dealing with his family and his indigestion. After supper he deposited him in the warmest corner, putting the port within call,—for port was the Chamberlain's only weakness, a memento of many exiles. He gave one last little anecdote about his brother, the ice merchant, which summoned two more glistening tears; for Prehlen, too,

liked port. And thus he came back to uninteresting business, sighing out:

"Let us return to the bridge of Solferino."

"By all means." De Morin took two sips, as if he were gathering them to his heart. Then he closed his eyes, at peace with all mankind.

"If you and I, dear Count," Prehlen said abruptly, "are working together, we must most certainly consider the Framlinghams."

"God bless them! You mean—"

"I mean the young lady."

"I was her grandfather's bosom friend. How strange it seems, how strange, how strange, and yet how like the world! In the autumn of '67,—the year of our first meeting, my dear Prehlen,—Gustave de Murinac had a terrible quarrel with the Emperor, which ended in his being forbidden the Palace. I used to live next door to him, in those days. That same night (October, I remember, and just such beastly weather as this) he burst into my apartment and bade me, amid a torrent of imprecations, never to put my trust in princes; also to be sure and give him a call whenever I was near Avize. He told me that he had shaken the dust of Paris off his feet; he left some of it on my carpet. He gave me an embrace that nearly destroyed me: he departed, and I never saw him more. Through the entire night I heard them hammering and rushing to and fro. Next day, I had to attend, unexpectedly, at Fontainebleau; when I returned home, number forty-seven was empty and deserted.

Those were days of tribulation for the faithful. I made many attempts to get to Avize, but never succeeded. Five years passed away, and one sad morning news reached me—in England—that my old friend was dead. The death of his eldest son had killed him. That, and the unhealthy nature of Avize; the Champagne district did not fit in with his gouty tendencies. Poor Gustave, what a whirlwind he was. And yet, what a poetic soul as well. My dear Prehlen, he had the richest imagination of any man I ever knew; he was an inveterate dreamer of dreams."

"It's very sad, no doubt," Prehlen broke in, "but I do n't see anything strange about it."

"Wait. Gustave rejoiced in hordes of children. There was Paul, the eldest," De Morin commenced to tell them off on his fingers; "he was killed at Sedan. There was Prosper, and Pierre, and Henriette—"

"The present Lady Framlingham?"

"Prehlen, you know everything. She was one of my favourites. She could not have been more than fifteen at the time they left Paris, but even then she had the sense of a grown woman."

"I can believe it."

"What handsome children they all were! And what unflagging spirits! Sometimes they would proclaim my apartment in a state of siege, and I was not even allowed to move about the corridors. Poor Paul, he was always playing at soldiers," and for a few weak moments the Chamberlain saw only the bright young face, which would have been by now every bit as dead if Paul had lived.

"To get back to Henriette," whispered Prehlen.

"The last I heard of her was that she had married a certain Lord Mendril, some six months after her father's death. Then I lost sight of the lot of them for close upon thirty years. She and I met again at Meaux railway station, one morning in the summer of this year."

"Where were you during Lord Framlingham's embassy?"

"I did not recognize the name. Their term was very short; and I never visited."

"And yet you are with me?" exclaimed the Norwegian, coming back to the present at a single bound.

"Your project is likely to benefit France, so I am with you. But, dear friend, no one thinks of a Mendril marriage. The whole affair is a figment of your fevered brain."

Prehlen shook his head.

"I will tell you a secret," urged the Chamberlain; "the dear child is already engaged."

"To whom?"—"To your attaché, Count Fersen."—"You surprise me."—"I had it in strict confidence. You won't mention it?"—"Not to a living soul—except

to Fersen."—"You are a vampire. But it is quite true that he loves her."—"He has a Catholic heart."—"And she—she is not averse to him."—"So he tells me—sometimes."—"I wish she would have him."—"So do I; but she never will."—"Why?"

"Because the Emperor loves her, and she knows it," exclaimed Prehlen; and he leaned back in his chair and gave himself over to deep thought.

"Is it not a fact," he asked presently, "that the Framlinghams are going to Compiègne?"

"I daresay they will be included in one of the parties."

"They are included in the first—next Saturday's? Am I not right?"

"You are a spy."

"Not at all." He paused for a minute. "I did not notice Lord Framlingham at his wife's reception."

"Do you attend all Madame's?"

"The gods forbid! He is not so busy as I am."

"He does a good deal of shopping when he is in Paris."

"I understand that he has gone to England?" pursued Prehlen.

"On important business."

"Then he *has* gone. I am commencing to see the thing complete."

"You have the advantage of me," moaned De Morin. Next minute, in a burst of undiplomatic frankness, he exclaimed:

"Listen, you wretch. This is what happened this afternoon," and he plunged forthwith into the story. Lady Framlingham had taken him on one side to inform him that her husband had left suddenly for England, on business which she evidently despised; and that it was doubtful whether he would be back in time to escort them to Compiègne. Might she therefore adhere to her acceptance, at any rate until Thursday, and then if her husband was not back she would let her old friend know—"it will be very sad to have to refuse after all,"—De Morin repeated her actual words,—“but Walter *may* be back; and, dear, dear uncle, I don't want to with-

draw our acceptance unless it becomes absolutely necessary."

Prehlen heard him gravely through.

"Then Lord Framlingham *does* know," he exclaimed, when the Count had told his story, and the other made no attempt to refute this assertion.

Lord Framlingham did know. His eyes were every bit as keen as De Morin's, and he had seen—what he had seen. Only a week prior to this afternoon in mid-October, with the Compiègne invitation just arrived (and refused, as he had ordered and fondly believed), he had resolved to take his little daughter back to the protection of Mendril Court and the western seas. Then had intervened a sudden summons to London; and it looked as though the gods meant to give her a safer sanctuary—to wit, Calcutta.

## Chapter III

Napoleon stood at the window, watching the autumn mists as they crept along the terrace at his feet.

He had arrived from Paris barely an hour back, to find the Count de Morin waiting for him upon the threshold of the Salles des Gardes. And the Grand Chamberlain, without a thought for his master's travel-stained garments, or for the footmen that thronged the corridors, had carried him off, then and there, to view this Palace of Compiègne, so rich in memories of his race. Their progress was a slow one; for the Count, so bent and shrivelled that he seemed himself merely a ghost from the vanished world he spoke of, grew garrulous, repeopling with brother phantoms the courts and galleries through which they passed, recalling a thousand memories long forgotten, and only now remembered at this sight of long-forgotten places. The task showed the Chamberlain's character in a new and not unsympathetic light. As he stood upon the first step of the Apollo staircase, and, pointing at the god himself, lamented departed glories, the Emperor reflected that he might not be merely the cold-hearted, bitter-tongued old cynic he had originally supposed. But the building is a small one. Presently De Morin made a little gesture signifying that the show was over. They were in the courtyard of the chapel. With quickened step he led the way towards the Imperial apartments. After many twists and turns, but without a single error, he brought his master out in the left wing of the Palace and onto the threshold of the latter's bedroom. "Behold," he cried, his hand upraised against the polished door, "the sleeping-room of Napoleon III!" then, hurriedly and with a deprecatory smile, "Sire, a thousand pardons!—your Majesty's bedroom: there, to the right, is the Council



Chamber; to the left, your study." Upon their left, and at right angles to the passage wall of Napoleon's suite, so as to bring the long corridor to an abrupt termination and make it bend,—also leftwards and at a right angle,—there stood a pair of folding-doors which evidently led into a room of larger dimensions than any of those immediately facing them. Napoleon turned half round. De Morin followed his glance, and lifted the cicerone's forefinger with another comprehensive gesture. "Those doors down there," said he, "open into a waiting-room for all who may have business with his—with your Majesty. The rooms beyond used to form the private apartments of the Empress and the Prince Imperial. Dear me, it is already five; the guests will be arriving. I must go and see that the prefect is in his place to receive them." Napoleon pushed forward into the bedroom, where Godefroy, with everything ready for his master's coming, sat gazing upward in rapt attention at Justice careering about the painted ceiling. He assisted the Emperor to make his toilet; then threw open the door into the study, that the latter might pass through and enjoy half an hour's solitude. Left to himself, the latter had attempted some settled occupation. The book-shelves were crowded, a writing-desk lay ready to his hand,—all to no purpose. He walked for a while listlessly to and fro, and now stood at the window, watching the autumn mists as they crept along the terrace at his feet.

So this was Compiègne! and that melancholy, mist-beshrouded landscape yonder, wherein park and forest mingled without distinguishable boundary, was the hunting-ground that had provided happiness for kings and emperors.

The spirit of the place took possession of his brain. He forgot himself and his own doings, his greatness and his littleness,—being at most times fully conscious of either,—everything, in fact, except the sadness stretching wide beneath him, that moaned for the glory of vanished days.

And then a procession of phantoms appeared from out the gloom and made their way across the terrace.

In the van, a mist of legendary Carollings, passing quickly enough, and for no reason beyond this, that the man who saw them had been at pains to learn something about the earlier occupants of the chair he sat on.

But it was different with the figures that followed.

Foremost among these came St. Louis, his delicate face enshrining grave, sweet eyes, which rested upon the Emperor with a smile of infinite pity. Louis XI next, and close upon his heels. There was not much tender pity about *him*; *his eyes* were mainly on the ground, with now and then a furtive glance on either side. To Napoleon's perturbed fancy he seemed a mixture of Mesnil and De Morin. Then Queen Henrietta of England moved slowly forward, journeying towards her husband's scaffold; and Louis XVI upon his way towards his own.

For a while the stone walk stood empty, a repetition of the time when the roar of life was elsewhere, and Compiègne deserted.

But presently new shapes appeared, the most distinct of those summoned by his heated brain.

Napoleon the Great, the founder of the race, came first; his arms behind him, in that pose which he, the descendant, so often strove to reproduce. Bonaparte, the sallow-faced, eagle-eyed, diminutive Italian, whose bankruptcy and liquidation were the greatest that this world has ever seen. So great indeed that his wife's chastity and his child's love had to be flung into the assets, and divided ratably among his creditors.

In his train there floated a crowd of modernized Bourbons, animate anachronisms, conscious themselves of their own absurdity.

And last of all, the third Napoleon!—also wound up in bankruptcy, but suffered to keep his home about him, because he had been wise, and had not sought for it among princes, and because bourgeois do not dissolve partnership in adversity. And so they passed, carrying along with them the breath of vanished ages. Kings, and emperors, and princes; all bowed to in their day, and called Monseigneur; all dead; their goods surrendered up to the Universal Receiver, who sits without adjourn-

ment or vacation, exercising jurisdiction over all the world.

And thinking on these things, Napoleon endeavoured to recall those miseries of unsatisfied ambition that had given him a throne. For his life he could not. He commenced to wonder how it was that he had ever wanted to leave Pimlico. Merely to enjoy fame and power?—things, in themselves, short-lived enough, and fleeting, yet invariably too heavy for men's shoulders, always a mockery and undeserved. He turned away with sorrow at his heart, and passed once more to that universally favourite occupation, the survey of his own hopes and fears.

The comfortable wood fire, the lamps shining forth from ever so many corners, had no attraction for him. He could not remain many minutes seated; the space was too confined to walk in; he stepped forth into the corridor, and stood there irresolute.

His first impulse was to repair to the Salles des Gardes and find out whether the most important guest had come. He yearned for fresh sight of her; for another mouthful of the exquisite misery that only increased his hunger. Besides, he lay in terrible doubt—she might not come at all. De Morin had said no word to show how far he had obeyed his master's half-hearted directions, while Napoleon himself had not ventured upon a single question. Accordingly, he advanced exactly three paces nearer to the realms which held the final answer; then stopped, and stood for a second time irresolute.

What place was there for him in the entrance-hall, among the lacqueys and the smaller baggage? What place, indeed? Uncanny dreams were making him forget his station. He turned upon his heels, recovered those three errant paces, and moved forward to the great folding-doors which led through the waiting-room into the Empress's apartments. It was like the first cold touch of death to see their emptiness. Oh, that he might fill them as he chose, and break with joyous talk and laughter the silence brooding over them from close on thirty years. And his memory took him back once more, and for a last time, to the realm of phantoms.

He beheld Eugénie among her gorgeous furniture and beneath painted ceilings, leading the talk of witty men and women. The beautiful Eugénie, with her hasty, generous temper and easy tears. Her husband appeared again, making, so to speak, his second entry. How happy in his home-life, this man, ever bending tenderly over his only son, at once his Reuben and his Benjamin. How happy, and oftentimes how gay. Napoleon pictured his cousin, the cares of Empire laid upon one side, leading a romp, calling for a change of games; abandoning "*Re Roi de Maroc est mort*," and begging them to substitute "*La toilette de Madame*" as the more amusing; while "*Madame*" herself—the how-manyeth Madame that had presided there—moved hither and thither in that superb way of hers, paying the little heed to all this homage that betrayed how worthless this homage really is. Would not God give him such a home!

The prayer was scarcely out of his mouth when Godefroy thrust his head in at the boudoir to warn him that dinner was served and the guests assembled.

A first glance showed our hero the military nature of the gathering; a second, its woeful incompleteness. Muriel was absent. So cruel a disappointment darkened the whole room. A reckless mood came over him: he did not attempt to conceal his chagrin. With a few cold bows to right and left, he brusquely led the way into dinner. And through four courses he spoke monosyllables and looked daggers.

Unfortunately, he found himself surrounded by seasoned veterans, who cared just nothing at all for the thunder-clouds that played about Jove's brow. They were quite respectful; and to begin with, waited for him to suggest the conversation. His obstinate silence drove them at last along their own road. They commenced to chat about the late glorious campaign. Little by little, Mesnil took the lead, assuming his master's place at this round table. He usurped in all innocence; indeed, a sort of tacit unanimity (which included one dissentient) forced the position upon him. As for the one dissentient, he sat and glowered straight in front of him, down a vista

of palms and roses and geraniums terminating in a view of De Morin's eager face. What right had Mesnil to talk about Manheulles in the presence of his sovereign? What business had the whole company to listen? Why should his ugly little voice enjoy the homage of an absolute silence, only intended by God for crowned heads? The situation grew more and more intolerable. Lady Threpps, upon Majesty's right, actually stopped midway in one of her silly sentences to listen to the Marshal, who at that moment was describing the camp at Pagny, with the help of his champagne-glass and one of Napoleon's salt-cellar.

The Emperor cleared his throat.

"My dear Marshal," he cried, "are you quite sure that you have got the farm right?"

De Morin smiled.

Mesnil glanced hurriedly at his champagne-glass. "I think so," said he.

"In my recollection the farm was ever so much nearer the river."

"I bow, sire, to you," Mesnil gaily responded, lifting the farm to his lips; "and really it do n't signify one way or the other."

"Surely, it is of the greatest importance," urged the Emperor.

Monsieur Verre, at the other end of the table, muttered, "naturally, of very great importance."

His wife, who was on the Emperor's left, turned to her left-hand neighbour, the British Ambassador, and asked him whether he did not find this conversation between the heroes most touching and instructive. Lord Threpps said "Yes," and gazed somewhat keenly at Napoleon.

The latter had already relapsed into moody silence. The Marshal left Pagny for Manheulles, and recounted an incident of the battle amid breathless interest. He was on safer ground.

"The funny thing is," he wound up, "I had just been treating Captain Müller to a severe wiggling. His battery was the only one lost, the whole day through; naturally, I did not care for that. 'Captain Müller,' I



said, 'it's little better than a harlequin's trick for an artillery officer to go prancing about in charge of a squad of infantry. They can do better without you. If their lieutenant is killed, let the sergeant take command, and so on till there is not a single man left. You can't do just as you like, simply because you're the nephew of a brigadier.' He didn't relish it, you may be sure. Without him—"

"Without him—" simpered Lady Threpps, so interested, you know.

"Without him, Madame, I and my staff would have been captured to a man."

"And his Majesty," rejoined her Ladyship, clasping frightened hands.

"Oh, he was at another part of the field."

"What reward did Captain Müller get?" asked Verre.

"The reward coveted by all brave men," said Mesnil, gobbling down a last morsal of partridge; "he died for his country."

"Marshal Clisserole," broke in the Emperor, "do you tell us a little about that march of yours after Francheville? Mesnil and I do not want people to imagine that we are the only men who saw any—any—ahem—any fighting."

Clisserole, however, was far too shy to launch into narrative. A grizzled veteran with gentle eyes, he had had to wait almost to the end of his career for his opportunity. He made good use of it, when it came. That rapid march from Epinal, the brilliant victory at Francheville, and his smartly effected junction with Marchmont outside Nancy, were the three incidents of the war which had gained the greatest individual praise from experts. Many went so far as to term them Napoleonic,—an epithet which at other times caused his Majesty considerable annoyance. To-night, however, Clisserole's useful side lay uppermost. Our hero reiterated his request. The Marshal gasped out that he was not able. Mesnil, who had listened to this interruption with a peaceful smile upon his face, made leisurely commencement of another story.

"Are you familiar with Paris?" the Emperor asked curtly of Lady Threpps.



"I am improving. My husband is teaching me."

"You will have a competent guide."

Lady Framlingham, too, has taken me in hand," giggled the young woman. She was more or less of an ingénue, half the age of Lord Threpps, and a wife of about a year's standing. Streatham—where stood her ancestral home—was still rampant in her. She rattled on with a charming winsomeness which ploughed its way through countless indiscretions.

Napoleon glanced cautiously across the foliage. His Chamberlain was conversing with Monsieur Verre about the extermination of caterpillars.

"I had hoped," said he, dropping his voice, "to have had the Framlinghams to meet your ladyship."

"So she told me. But her husband had to go unexpectedly to England at the commencement of the week. You know," she added in an arch aside, "the Viceroy has suddenly resigned. You must not breathe a word: it is in none of the papers. *Dear* Lord Framlingham will very likely get the post."

"India?" his Majesty gasped.

"Yes," she nodded; "*is n't* he fortunate?"

If the room was dim before, it was now quite dark. She was not coming! She had been asked, and she was not coming! How he commenced to hate this talkative doll beside him, decked out in jewels, a coronet upon her head fit to vie with the crown imperial. How different Muriel. In the midst of his terrible yearning he gathered a touch of indefinable delight in whatever title to possession this fact could give him, that he, the centre of so dazzling an assembly, was miserable because she was absent.

"Yes, many a time," came De Morin's voice across the table. "We used to be merry enough then. We had people to make us merry—Octave Feuillet, Countess Metternich, Prosper Merimée, Rouher, De Morny, Lord Clarendon often, Lord Malmesbury sometimes, and many another whose name I have forgotten."

"How you must regret them."

"Well, Monsieur Verre, I suppose every man would wish to recall his youth."

"I don't want my youth back," grumbled Changarnier. "I had not such a pleasant time. While you were eating and swil—drinking at this table, I had to keep my stomach full on a franc and a half a day. Not excessive, that, for a growing man, was it, Monsieur Verre?"

"No, one cannot call it excessive," responded Monsieur Verre. "I also had a hard youth. For the first nine years of my practice, I did n't erect so much as a brick wall."

"You have built a good deal since then," De Morin said gracefully.

"You are right. Very few architects who began life with my poor prospects have managed to become Prime Minister of France."

"Even for three weeks," mumbled De Morin.

"Have you built much?" asked the literal Lord Threpps.

De Morin replied for his bashful friend.

"A great deal. The new houses at Neuilly are his design. Then he has erected some charming villas in the country."

"At Meaux," said Madame Verre. "Why, Lady Framlingham's villa there was by my husband. Your Lordship has visited it?"

How the remainder of that disagreeable evening passed by, Napoleon never could discover. It seemed interminable. The Chamberlain had warned him that, on this his first guest-night at Compiègne, he must not withdraw too soon, so that his visitors might grasp how thoroughly he enjoyed their society. He had to move round the hateful circle, swallowing inanities. The only person present who consoled him in the least was Madame Changarnier. He fancied that he could detect in her the faintest trace of a likeness to his beloved. He talked to her longer than was customary, or she cared for. Her husband noticed it—he was much her senior—and felt that he might become a Marshal after all. But poor Napoleon could not warm himself all night in the rays of this borrowed refulgence. He had to move on. And when he found himself face to face with Lord Threpps, the Ambassador, who looked as though he hailed origi-

nally from the Dogger Bank, he could endure the entertainment no longer. Heedless of De Morin, of every thing save his aching heart, he fled the festive throng. He reached his bedroom and disrobed in a frenzy of despair. Then blew down the chimney of his lamp with a fervour which nearly caused an explosion, and plunged into bed. No, he could not sleep. There was nothing for it but to rise and resume his garments, flung off with so much eagerness. Godefroy must have expected him to finish the evening in his study. The lamps were still alight. Very well, he would finish the evening there, aye, and the night too.

The window, which showed the panorama of Compiègne, lay open. The mists had gone, leaving the dark limits of the land cold and clear beneath the moonlit sky. Faint strains of music mounted from the covered courtyard; it helped to stir his emotions. His soul seemed to become purified and ennobled. He was rising to unknown heights of heroism.

He would forget her. The horrible pain should go about with him, and none should know. Having yearned long for it, he had at last tasted the applause of millions—to find it worthless. He would taste that which he had rarely longed for, and never had,—his own. Yes, henceforth he would behave in a manner worthy his own commendation. Ah, the delight of it. But stay, he, a great emperor, with nothing left to gain, what incentive was there to make him lead a life like this? Surely, the same that had urged him on in days when he was a heart-worn barrister able to gain nothing. If that picture had been a pleasing one,—the threadbare failure moving along the road of life triumphant, this new one was far more beautiful.

Far, far more beautiful. The great, silent Emperor; his strong face bitter and saturnine, but bearing a tender smile for little children; the canker ever at his breast. The mighty conqueror carrying this horrible pain about with him, so that not even the closest knew. And that should be his rôle, when his turn came to join the shades upon the terrace. Yes, God helping him, he would forget her.

There came a tap at the door. Napoleon knew the finger for De Morin's; here was a chance to test his great resolve.

"Come in," he cried, looking half round with radiant face.

The Chamberlain may have expected a different reception. He showed no surprise.

"Your Majesty has sent for me."

"Not I. But come in, De Morin, I am always glad to see you."

"You were satisfied with to-night's entertainment?"

"More than satisfied. Your skill in these matters is wonderful."

"To hear such words from my master is a very great privilege."

"Count, you are a terrible old courtier. Come over here; does not the park look beautiful by moonlight?"

"Very beautiful."

"And the forest beyond? How sombre it stands against the sky."

"Truly. His Majesty was satisfied with my choice of guests?"

"In every way." The heart-anguish which he was to carry with him always had begun.

"Pardon me, may I close the window?"

Napoleon nodded; De Morin went on complacently: "Yes, I flatter myself they are well matched. Brisson is such an excellent foil to Marshall Mesnil. Then, Clisserole and Changarnier are a good pair; both of them so similar in outward appearance, so different in everything else."

"I prefer Marshal Clisserole."

"You are right in that. He is loyally attached to your Majesty's person."

"And Changarnier?"

"Changarnier is disappointed."

"He is dangerous?" urged Napoleon.

"No, no, I never said that."

"You implied it."

"His Majesty will do well to be very careful."

"He *will* be very careful."

"The Verres are a useful couple," De Morin proceeded in his enumeration.

"I do not like her manners. She is too brusque."

"The Republican way."

"I wish she would keep it for the next Republic."

The Chamberlain smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"They were stop-gaps," said he. "The Prime Minister and Madame Carache were coming originally. Unfortunately, their only daughter is dangerously ill."

"I am sorry."

"They shall know; it will help them to bear up under their misfortune."

It was his Majesty's turn to smile. He did so, very charmingly.

"I wish I could think so."

"Lord Threpps," the old man continued, "stopped me just now to tell me what a charming evening he had spent."

"He looks a perfect fool."

"Fréron, who was at Vienna with him, says he is anything but —. Now, Lady Threpps presents no difficulties."

"Indeed, no," Napoleon cried, some of his former radiance returning. "I cannot gauge high-born diplomatists like Lord Threpps; but I fancy I know all about my Lady. Indeed, I was brought up among that class. Oh yes, I can take her measure."

"Did you notice how she jarred upon her husband?"

"No."

"Ah, those unequal marriages!" moralized De Morin; "they always end miserably. You may be sure she fears him, while he hates and despises her."

He accompanied his words—spoken so significantly—with a particularly hideous little smile. Napoleon commenced to suffer in real earnest. His resolve had not been lightly taken: he would need all his endurance to keep it. He crossed to the fireplace and flung himself into an arm-chair.

De Morin seemed ruthless. He followed his master, and stood looking down into the moody face, just now so radiant. It was a failing of his, this insatiable craving



to gloat over victory. Yet he would hardly have been so unwise thus to stir sleeping dogs had his victory been an absolute one. Alas, it was merely apparent. He held in his hand a letter, arrived that evening, wherein Lady Framlingham begged to be allowed to come one day late. Her husband returned that night. Accordingly they could, and with the Emperor's gracious permission, would present themselves at Compiègne at noon on Sunday. De Morin had no alternative but to send back a cordial telegram, nevertheless he regarded the matter in a very gloomy light.

"Our numbers are not complete," he commenced softly.

"I did not notice."

"I am glad. I feared his Majesty might."

"Then why do you dispel my ignorance?" was the sullen answer.

"Because the absent guests will be here to-morrow."

"Good God, man," his Majesty burst out, "am I the major-domo? What do I care whom you ask, and when they arrive? I have n't got to find rooms for them, have I? I am not paid to do that, am I? If you are too old to do your work yourself, I can easily find some one else to take your place."

"The Framlinghams—" the Chamberlain said placidly; but his Majesty broke forth again, this time more gently:

"Dear old friend, do first be seated. You will send me quite mad if you continue thus to stand over me."

"The Framlinghams were invited according to your instructions. They accepted the invitation."

"Well?"

"Well, a few days after their acceptance Lady Framlingham informed me that her husband had been suddenly summoned to London, and that she feared in consequence that they would not be able to come."

"Why am I worried with these details? Cannot you see that they do not interest me?" It was almost a cry for quarter.

"I do not like your Majesty to suppose that I would wilfully disobey your orders."



Napoleon sprang from his chair.

"I know that you are one of the most zealous of servants. If I asked you to invite the Framlinghams, it was for a reason which you suspected and which I made no effort to conceal. That reason exists no longer. De Morin, De Morin, you are old enough to be my father; you placed me on my throne. Can you not be my friend? Listen: I did love this girl—my God, I love her still. But I see quite well I can never marry her; and, heaven knows"—his voice trembled with emotion—"I would not harm her for all the world. I have resolved to banish her from my mind. Just before you came in I had been looking—looking out upon the lovely night. A great strength seemed to fill my heart; the resolve came with it. Why do you come probing the wound? You know well enough that I love her; you know, too, I can never marry her? Why do you come probing the wound?"

If the Grand Chamberlain felt no pity, at least he could simulate it. His face became puckered with anguish.

"Alas," he cried, almost in tears, "your Majesty makes my heart bleed. Be strong, sire; be strong; and the good God will aid you."

He remembered the letter in his hand; and carelessly forgetting that as yet he had said nothing about it, he added: "I will send a message forthwith to the Avenue des Villiers to let them know that the party is breaking up early on Monday."

"But why? If they are not coming—"

De Morin saw his blunder, but he could not remedy it. Napoleon saw it too.

"Then they *are* coming?" he asked slowly.

"Yes. Lord Framlingham returns to Paris this evening. Her—her Ladyship has pleaded permission to come to-morrow. What could I do?"

"Lord and Lady Framlingham," Napoleon recommenced after a long pause, and in quite altered tones, "have done nothing that we should insult them. They must come to-morrow, and Mu—their daughter with them."

"And your unhappy Majesty?"

"I can trust myself," came the haughty answer. "Besides—besides—" said the voice, slipping from disdain to despair, "besides, she is going away, De Morin; she is going away to India, and I—I shall never see her any more."

And without more ado his Majesty burst into tears.

"My poor Louis," soothed the other, "how you remind me of your poor, dear father."

## Chapter IV

As a matter of fact, Lord Framlingham did not return home that evening. It made no difference; Lady Framlingham, her daughter, and her eldest son arrived at Compiègne on the Sunday morning.

The days which followed were very happy, and also very miserable. Very miserable; for Napoleon saw little of his beloved. Whatever words passed between them were cold and formal: he could not gather from her manner whether she knew of his great sacrifice.

He *did*, though; and the thought of it alone sufficed to comfort him those interminable mornings when his guests had scattered through the forest and left him to the undisturbed enjoyment of state papers. He worked at these with a will, stopping merely now and again to snatch five minutes at the window or to admire his own heroism. It was a great thing to be so brave. It promised well for those drear days, not far ahead, when *hours* at his window could not yield a glimpse of her sunshade, and when the Gare de Lyon, which leadeth to Brindisi, would be the sole memento of her left in all his Empire. Your really heroic man likes an audience. It is pleasant to have folks round you when you are about to display moral grandeur. And if these onlookers should happen to include the young lady whose existence causes the commotion, so much the better,—it will increase the sense of satisfaction.

Surely, such exquisite misery needed no recompense. Yet full recompense was vouchsafed it, and every evening. The round dinner-table suddenly betook itself to paradise; the drawing-rooms became Elysium. Mesnil no longer led the conversation. Lady Threpps found that she had lost a listener, while Napoleon himself for-

got where he had been during the battle of Manheulles. My word, how he talked! How he basked in the Presence! that silent, silent Presence which he knew heard all he said.

And afterwards, in the drawing-room, he would be permitted the felicity of half a dozen words.

"Mademoiselle enjoys her visit to Compiègne?"

"Yes, sire. No one could fail to do so. It is so beautiful."

"Mademoiselle has visited Pierrefonds?"

"We went there yesterday, my brother and I."

Never more than this; but it always sent him away with joy at his heart, resolved to carry out the battle to the bitter end.

On Tuesday night, however, his Majesty went a step further: a host is bound to do something for the amusement of his guests.

Muriel was seated beside her mother. The Emperor stood a few yards off, talking with the English Ambassador. Suddenly he turned to Lady Framlingham.

"His Lordship is anxious to see Pierrefonds. I have offered to take him there to-morrow afternoon. I tell him that Madame would be a far better guide."

"Sire, you flatter me."

"Will you join our excursion? Lady Threpps is coming, and the Chamberlain shall take charge of us and show us all there is to be seen."

"Delighted, I am sure. I love Pierrefonds; it is many years since I was there."

"And—and Mademoiselle?"

"I shall be very glad," murmured Mademoiselle.

"I will go and consult the Grand Chamberlain."

"De Morin," he said, "I am arranging a little excursion to Pierrefonds for to-morrow afternoon. Will you join?"

"I shall have to take your Majesty's place," the Count replied.

Napoleon flushed. "What do you mean?"

"You forget you have given M. Prehlen an appointment at three."

"He is staying the night. We can postpone our interview until after dinner."

"Impossible. Carache is to be present. He will be here at two. His daughter's serious condition makes it imperative that the Premier should return to Paris with the least possible delay."

"We must do without Carache."

"Simply to visit Pierrefonds!" Napoleon winced.

"I suppose I must submit," he grumbled.

"Make your mind quite easy. I will do all to make the excursion a success."

Monsieur Prehlen and the Prime Minister appeared punctual to their appointed time. They were overwhelmed with grief when they learned how they had interfered with the Emperor's happiness. He begged them not to mention it. He had become reconciled since last night. There is such dignity in absence. She would think of him hard at work in his solitary grandeur. That is, provided the party were a dull one. It promised well in that respect.

"I feared something of the sort," persisted Prehlen, who never could have enough of apologizing; "we met them starting, just as we entered the Palace. That idle young dog of a Fersen fastened himself onto them without an instant's hesitation."

"To business, gentlemen," Napoleon cried sharply. The party might not be a dull one after all.

The Russian Ambassador pulled a bundle of papers from his breast pocket and laid them on the table. Carache sat opposite him. He watched the other intently; but, to do him justice, his mind would keep wandering to that bedroom in the Rue de Berlin, where his little girl lay dying—stretched upon his own luxurious bed, the sunbeams round her. At least, that was how she lay two hours back; and when he thought that he might return to find the sunbeams faded, he could hardly keep the tears from his eyes.

Napoleon, at the head of the table, enjoyed a splendid view. Each window formed a sort of aureole for either of his companions. With his eyes on Prehlen, he could

watch the terrace and the bowered walk, as it swung round to the chapel gate and the Soissons road. He had only to survey his Premier to see the terrace again, the park, and the forest beyond. In this favourable position he was hardly more attentive than Carache.

To get back to Prehlen. The Ambassador laid his documents upon the table. He cleared his throat, patted his beard, the while looking from one to the other of his adversaries with great affection.

His first words came in a whisper.

"I am authorized to make your Majesty very important proposals. They are contained in these letters, which I received from my master yesterday morning."

Napoleon looked idly at the bundle on the table; the Premier looked idly at the bundle on the table; then both exclaimed "Ah" almost simultaneously, and both relapsed into silence.

"But before anything else—we cannot quite think we were fairly dealt with in the late unhappy war."

"You surprise me," said Carache.

"No, we cannot quite think it. We were to have Prussian Poland," and he gazed more in sorrow than in anger at Napoleon, who murmured, "Prussian Poland—Prussian Poland," as though he were taking a survey of the park to find it.

"Prussian Poland was the price of our defensive alliance—of our neutrality even. Where is Prussian Poland?"

"Prussian Poland," cried Carache, rousing himself from a reverie that had been on the verge of tears, "is east of Brandenburg and northeast of Silesia. That is all I can tell you as to its position."

Prehlen had hardly come prepared for a conference of this description. He continued with additional gravity:

"My government, however, is content to overlook this act—this trifling omission. They are willing to believe that it was due, not so much to want of faith as to dire necessity. They recognize that you would have found it difficult to have continued the war."

"They must kindly not recognize anything of the sort," rapped out Carache.



"So I am instructed to declare the matter satisfactorily closed. Here," lifting his documents, "I come to the proposals."

Napoleon saw a chance of reaching Pierrefonds.

"Stop, dear Monsieur. Carache, ought not the Foreign Minister to be present?"

"I am competent to take his place."

"Proceed," with a sigh to his Excellency.

"Two proposals. The first is an alliance, offensive as well as defensive, against England."

"The second?"

"A marriage between his Majesty and the Princess Catharine, elder daughter of the Grand Duke Peter. She is very beautiful."

The forceps were well in by now.

"She is very beautiful," repeated Prehlen; "her face resembles a dream."

"My master feels the honour acutely," Carache interposed with greater literalness than he was aware of.

"Did you say that the alliance was to be aggressive?"

"Most certainly."

"That means war?"

"To the death."

"How terrible!" muttered the Premier, now that his little girl lay dying.

"And what do we take?" he added presently.

"Anything you can conquer, except India."

"Of course you take that?"

"We take that."

"Never!" shouted Napoleon; "never, while I am on the throne!" He was thinking of Tilbury and Liverpool Street and the Albert Docks, to him so often the way of sorrows.

"She is very beautiful," Prehlen murmured, mistaking the reasons for this vehemence.

"My master means that the partition is an unjust one."

"India is big," the Ambassador allowed.

"Very big. We ought at least to have Assam and Bengal. These two provinces, in addition to Burmah, would only be a fair share."

"I will make a note of it," and he did so. "I fear, however, that my government will prove adamant. They are determined to *be* India."

He sat for a few minutes wrapped in thought. "Won't you take an equivalent?" he asked.

"Canada — the Mauritius — Malta — Gibraltar — the Gold Coast? there they are for you to choose."

"We will take their rights in Africa and Canada. These will balance India. Now we can start fair."

"I forgot. Canada, I observe, goes to Venezuela: it's something to do with the Monroe Doctrine, whatever that may mean. Still, you can have anything else. There is a large choice."

"Your government is very obliging. It does not leave many points open for adjustment."

"Our way, dear Monsieur. We find we save so much time."

"And it succeeds?"

"Certainly, when the other high contracting party keeps faith with us."

"Monsieur refers to Prussian Poland."

"Monsieur is wrong. I was thinking of—"

Napoleon made so bold at this point as to attempt a little sarcasm.

"What about England?"

"Your keenness has touched upon the most difficult point. My government suggests—mind, merely a suggestion—a joint occupation. With that working properly, we could use the place as a species of Siberia or New Caledonia—for convicts, you know, and political exiles, and Jews. They like Jews in England. We are prepared to entertain alternative proposals."

"You are very kind," Napoleon retorted. "Your Excellency has forgotten one thing."

"Yes?" cried Prehlen, pencil in hand.

"The English people! What is to be done with them? How are we to partition their navy and their army?"

These words were uttered with great fire. They reminded Prehlen of the Porte St. Martin. He had expected English proclivities. The negotiations were entering upon a critical phase: he felt quite delighted.

So he returned to the Princess. "She is very beautiful," said he, fumbling among his letters: "ah, here is her portrait."

Napoleon gazed at her in silence. The sacrifice would be hard indeed; for the photograph disclosed a typical specimen of the later Muscovite, with a face almost as aggressive as the alliance. He gave it back, sighing ambiguously, and his eyes wandering away towards the forest heights about Pierrefond.

There was indeed a dignity in absence—in Muriel's absence, that is. The void she left seemed to reproach him for his cowardice.

"Is the Princess a *sine quâ non*?" he asked wearily.

"My master means, is the offensive alliance an indispensable preliminary to the marriage?"

"Yes," said Napoleon, still weary, "yes, that is what I mean."

"I fear so. The war between you two powers must come sooner or later. We are prepared to help you now, when your people is animated with one spirit. Later on, we may not see the matter in the same light."

The Premier urged that he saw no reason for war with England, either sooner or later. They had Lower Alsace. They required no farther extension of territory; and certainly not of their colonial empire.

"Besides," he wound up, "England jointly occupied, and filled with convicts and exiles, does not hold out a very alluring prospect for us, her neighbour."

"You will soon get accustomed."

Napoleon took up the thread.

"England might have made herself very nasty during the late war. Instead, she maintained a strict neutrality. Her inhabitants raised subscriptions; they sent doctors and nurses to tend our wounded. Is this the way"—pointing disdainfully at Prehlen's documents—"we ought to show our gratitude?"

The other's contempt matched his own.

"Diplomacy is entering a new phase," he sneered, "if the blunders of a state are to be used in her favour."

Napoleon rose from his chair. He had assumed an air of sublime decision.

"If your proposals included a defensive alliance that was stringently non-aggressive, I would gladly accept. As you rightly remark, the young lady is indeed beautiful. This offer of her hand fills me with exquisite misery"—which was true enough—"seeing that the accompanying terms are quite impossible. No, Monsieur, Russia must look elsewhere for her ally. England has been an asylum for me, as well as for many of my race. She shall never fight with France while I am Emperor. Nay, if she comes to me in her need—"

Carache coughed.

"My master sees no advantage for France in an English war. If your government chooses to allow the marriage on the terms stated by his Majesty, well and good."

Napoleon employed this digression to ring the bell.

"Take time," cried the Ambassador. "I don't expect to conclude weighty business at a single sitting. Grant me a second interview—say, a week hence."

"It is always a pleasure to meet your Excellency. But I fear we might meet every day for a whole year without shaking my resolve."

"To-day week, at the same hour?" and Prehlen poised his pencil.

"If you like," smiled Majesty. "I shall be back in Paris by then."

"Good. Three, Wednesday next, at the Élysée."

"Meanwhile, your Excellency can mention my master's alternative to your government."

"I fear it will be useless. India has suffered under a grinding despotism long enough. The time has come when she must be free."

"Of course you will free her?"

"Certainly."

"As you have freed Finland?"

"As we have freed Finland."

"Or as you would like to free Armenia?"

"Precisely. Monsieur forgets that we are Christians. It is only poor Mahomet who handicaps his followers. Russia is the champion of the oppressed over all the world. My countrymen in Norway feel it, you may be

sure. Only the other day, my maiden aunt who now resides in Christiania assured me that the place was praying aloud for Russia to come and annex it."

"The lady may be prejudiced."

"She is. She glories in it."

"Ah, here is Godefroy. He will show you your room. Your Excellency stays the night?"

"With pleasure, sire."

"Good. Godefroy, conduct Monsieur."

The door closed upon them. Napoleon turned to Carache, who—poor fellow—turned to his watch.

"The poor little one is very ill?" the Emperor asked, full of sympathy that came from his late sight of the Princess.

"Very ill," faltered Carache.

"You would like to be off at once."

"Alas, there is no train."

"A special? I will send at once to order one."

Carache shook his head. "A few hours can make no difference. And—sire—I am—a—coward; I would rather not see the—little one—suffer," and now the tears flowed fast.

Napoleon turned away, his own eyes bedimmed with tears. Outside, the last rays of autumn sunlight reddened the landscape, flinging a broad path of scarlet across the terrace. And the Emperor, his heart full of sorrow for the man beside him, beheld something which filled him with far greater sorrow for himself.

There, in an avenue that opened out immediately beneath his window, two figures could be seen slowly approaching. They were moving directly towards him, so that, from the first, it was possible to recognize them. They did not notice him. For the girl—and the very sight of her seemed to stop the current of his blood—had her eyes fixed obstinately upon the ground, while Nicholas Fersen, her companion, kept his as obstinately upon her face.

It was clear he was speaking to her in earnest tones. Clear, also, that he waited often for some reply,—a reply which never came. And Napoleon watched them. He thought no more of poor Carache. He forgot his own



great resolution. He had eyes and brain alone for the darkened figures that came forward so slowly from the background of reddened trees, the dying leaves about their feet. What could it be that Fersen kept repeating with so much vehemence? Suddenly the young fellow stopped dead, and stretched forth both hands with an imploring gesture. Still no reply.

The great widespread palms dropped abruptly; an angry frown came over the pleasant face. And angry words must have fallen from the pleasant mouth; for, at the same instant, the girl raised her head and blazed forth an answer which was apparently not the one required.

Then both walked on in silence.

They disappeared in the dip of the gravel walk. When they returned to view, slowly ascending the steps that led on to the terrace, the man was once more all supplication, the girl all silence. But her eyes were no longer cast upon the ground, and they still bore in them some trace of her recent anger. The two approached so close beneath his window that Napoleon might have called to them without raising his voice above a whisper. He flattened himself against a curtain, turning as he did so. Carache had stolen quietly away.

Once at the top, the girl faced about. Obviously she had had enough of this altercation: she meant to stay where she was, until her relations joined her. Count Fersen turned too; Napoleon stepped forth from his hiding-place among the draperies.

How he wished that he could hear what the Russian was saying. But he had seen enough to cause him intense disquiet; to convince him of the good ground for his jealousy of Count Fersen. Muriel—fancy free in all his dreams of her, careless to boyishness, quite ignorant of love—had, at any rate, got far enough in worldly ways to have this sort of scene with a young, and probably loose, attaché on the slopes of a semi-public terrace.

Of what sort were the words which must have gone before those passionate entreaties, that scornful silence? Napoleon shuddered. What was the meaning of the



sudden blaze? His own deep passion at once imagined the worst. And a great desire seized him to have her for his own,—if damaged, then damaged, at whatever sacrifice, at whatever cost to either, in whatever way (provided it was also the quickest), and having her, to keep her by his side for evermore. Meanwhile, he pressed closer against the window.

“Count Fersen! Count Fersen! Count Fersen!” cried Prehlen from an upper room. “Count Fersen, you must be good enough to come at once. I have instant need of you.”

The young fellow looked up at the region of the invisible voice, then turned back to his companion, in some embarrassment. Muriel made him a not over-gentle sign that he might depart, resuming at once her attitude of motionless expectancy.

It was more than mortal flesh could stand. The Emperor sprang into and out of his room, seizing his hat as he went. His quivering body stumbled at every step. He made for the private door which led from the Council chamber into the terrace; he could scarcely open it.

The noise recalled Muriel from her reverie. She turned. The Emperor was sauntering leisurely towards her, a charming smile upon his face.

## Chapter V

"Mademoiselle has never walked from Pierrefonds?"

"It is not far. We left at two."

"It must be over ten miles. And the others, are they walking?"

"Some of them. They had not started when we—when I left."

"Every one is not so energetic. Tell me, were you not afraid to come through the forest without an escort? The days are drawing in."

"Oh, no, sire," she answered carelessly, "I am used to going about alone at any hour. I do it in England, and at Meaux as well."

"Meaux," he exclaimed with plaintive gaiety, "dear, dear Meaux!—those sw—ahem, those bright summer days have fled forever. How I detest the autumn."

"You should not say so. This autumn must be a very happy one for you. And Compiègne is very beautiful."

He welcomed the reproof. If only he might believe that she thought of him even a little. But, more than all, he wanted her to fall back into that careless manner which had rendered her so adorable on the occasion of their earlier meetings. Before long the worship of his eyes and of his softened voice made it that she did resume the haphazard, irreverent treatment of his person, which was her greatest charm. Perhaps she used this unconsciously as a weapon of defence.

"Mademoiselle speaks truly: Compiègne is very beautiful. May I not show her some of its features?" he waved a hand over the park beneath them.

She hesitated. "But the others?"

"They cannot be here yet. And—and we will not

stray beyond the boundary"; so she consented. Napoleon marked her reluctance. He knew that they both were thinking of the upper windows.

They left the terrace, proceeding along the avenue which she had lately traversed with Fersen. He felt her presence strong upon him; and for a while he could not speak. The silence grew.

"You know this path," he faltered; he was still thinking of the upper windows.

"Yes. Nay, but I prefer to keep to it. The others are sure to come this way."

He sighed. "Then Mademoiselle wants them to find us?"

"Surely," she laughed.

"Does not this remind you a little of Meaux?"

"Not in the least. There is no forest at Meaux; no château, no park. I cannot see the faintest resemblance."

"They tell me that you are going to India?" he recommenced questioning.

"Who told you?"

"Lady Threpps."

"Lady Threpps!" with huge contempt. "I am surprised you listen to her—no, I am not surprised."

"But there is some truth in the rumour?" he persisted.

"I cannot say."

"Why is Lord Rochberie resigning?"

"His wife cannot stand the climate."

"The Vicereine is almost as important as the Viceroy?"

"Exactly"—and Muriel, always in an enchanted castle, despite her brusqueries, beheld visions of a crown imperial, far more splendid than the crown viceregal coming to her mother.

"And you—would you like to go to India?"

"It will be change."

His manner had altered so completely during the last few minutes, passing altogether from cheerful commonplace to plaintive innuendo begun in fear and trembling, and never carried through, that she felt some sort of crisis was at hand. Her nerves were made of

tougher fibre. She moved forward quite coolly. She answered his questions, and beyond that did n't help him an inch along his road. But she never lost sight of the crown imperial.

Poor Napoleon! In a few weeks she would be gone, and his chance with her.

"Do you really think you would like India?" he repeated.

"Oh, it is all the same to me, where I am. Some parts of the country are beautiful enough."

"Not more beautiful than France."

"Why should I trouble to make the comparison?"

"But—but—Mademoiselle!"

"But what, Monsieur? I am English."

"I know, I know," he groaned. "Come," reviving somewhat, "let us walk through the Berceau. You must see it: it was my great-grandfather's gift to the place."

"Indeed. It is very dark—no, I hardly think I care to enter."

"Mademoiselle is never afraid. There are lights farther along. Take my arm."

She suffered herself to be persuaded. Her arm in his, she felt him trembling; and she commenced to wonder what sort of man he might be. Yet, curiously enough, she felt no surprise at his next question.

"By the way," he asked hurriedly, as if he had forgotten, "did Mademoiselle say that she walked from Pierrefond without an escort?"

"No."

"No, of course,—now I recollect. Lord Mendril was with her."

"I never said so."

"Indeed. Who—who was it you said?" He looked quite pained at having forgotten.

"It cannot interest you."

"I know, I know; but you might humour me."

"No one more important than Count Fersen," she said with a fine show of unconcern.

"Count Fersen? Am I acquainted with him?"

"I think so."

"No, really—"

"Oh, yes, you are," she laughed.

"Quite right. He is an attaché at the Russian Embassy. Your brother was with you, naturally?"

"No. We came alone."

"You and Count Fersen?"

"Why not?"

"How foolish of me. You are old friends."

"We have known him a long time."

"Pray pardon me. As you said just now, it is no business of mine."

For the moment she looked as though she did not quite concur in this last statement.

"Lady Muriel," he began earnestly,—and speaking her name thus for the first time in her presence, his voice quivered,—“Lady Muriel, you must forgive me if I have gone too far. The truth is, my whole life has been spent in England. My preferences are altogether English, and—and you and your good relatives are the only English people with whom I come in contact. I value the privilege highly; and it may be that I venture to interest myself in your affairs more than a stranger has any right to do. You are my neighbours at Meaux—Meaux, in which my heart delights, where I can fling aside the trappings of state and be at peace. You yourself, Mademoiselle, will always have around you in my eyes—whether you like it or not—the calm of that first evening when we met by the river-side. Do not blame me, blame rather the accident which led you thither; for the softness of that night will henceforth and forever colour every thing and every one whom chance then led in my way. It would have been the same had I found—say, Madame Verre instead of you. The mysterious fascinations of that night, fitting, as it did, my soul that yearned for rest, would have enveloped her no whit differently.” He did not say in what.

“That is my explanation for my apparent rudeness in questioning you so persistently. I will be quite frank with you. I was overjoyed when I learnt that you had come to Paris. And I shall be sincerely grieved if your father’s good fortune carries you off to India. Believe

me, my dear young lady, provided only that the Earl and Countess are equally complaisant, I never intend to let the exigencies of state"—he was thinking of Prehlen—"come between our friendship. And when they finally depart, and the time comes for you to marry, and neither you nor they visit France any more, I shall cherish the memory of this intimacy as one of the brightest episodes of my reign."

He ceased, and gazed at her, a heavenly smile suffusing his countenance. His words were so high-souled, that he condoned their having carried him somewhat further than he had originally intended.

Muriel's first feeling was one of consternation. She said never a word in reply to his drawn-out eloquence. Her silence surprised him.

Her coldness, when she did speak, startled him even more.

"We ought to be returning," she said.

"The house is straight ahead."

"I prefer to go back by the way I came."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Mademoiselle may suit herself. It is not for me to object to any extension of our walk." Relenting a minute later, he muttered softly:

"So you see that is why I do not want you to go to India."

"Whether we go or not, we shall leave France in January."

"Ah, you will be back at Meaux in the summer."

"Indeed not. We do not come every year. If you want to renew your—your intimacy with my father and mother, you will have to come to Tipton," and she indulged in a smile which he would have rather been without. "The Verres are coming next summer, and possibly Lord and Lady Threpps."

"And Count Fersen?"

"Very likely."

They were on the threshold of the covered walk. Napoleon halted. He turned full upon her, so that she, too, was forced to stop.

"Be warned by me," he cried, "be warned by me,



dear Mademoiselle. I am older than you are. And the Emperor's eyes see far."

"I do not understand you."

"I should do wrong not to make my meaning plain."

"Then make it plain."

"I am bound to learn things in connexion with those who move about the court. I would much rather not retail them. If I do so, it is for your sake alone, dear Mademoiselle."

"Well?"

"Simply this. Count Fersen is a libertine and a drunkard,"—all this was said with feverish haste,—“he is not fit to be your husband; he is not fit even to come in contact with you."

"And yet you call yourself a gentleman!"

She might have struck him. The marks of the blow were upon his face.

"Mademoiselle Leduc—" he commenced, apologetically, but she would not hear him out.

"Oh, Muriel," he began again, "have pity on me. If I have placed myself in a contemptible position, it is for your sake alone. Cannot you see as much?"

"I cannot see by what right you blacken Count Fersen's character. He has done you no harm. If I choose to walk with him, that is my business."

"And not mine?"

"Certainly not."

"And this after what I have said to you!"

He fell to one side. They resumed their path in silence. When Muriel spoke again, she had got back her ordinary composure.

"I presume you said what you did because of that night at Meaux?"

"What is the use of discussing the matter further?" came the sullen answer.

My Lady administered another sharp reproof.

"It seems to me," she said, "that your Majesty is behaving very badly." Her anger rose, the further she proceeded. "You are putting me in a ridiculous position, and for no better reason than that we are English, and your neighbours at Meaux, and because you hap-

pened to meet me one night by chance beside the river. I wish to heaven you had met Madame Verre. It may be very true, all you have said to me about your English leanings and the rest of it; but nevertheless I do not see why you should bring me down to this deserted arbour in order to make me your confidante and abuse my friends. You ought not to have done it. You ought not to ask us to the Élysée in the way you do. You ought not to have invited us to Compiègne, unless—unless—” and though she was not overwhelmed with confusion, she could not finish her sentence.

He listened, open-mouthed. And directly he discovered that she had come to a full stop, he confessed his error and prayed to be forgiven.

“Oh,” said she, brushing aside her anger with a cheerless laugh, “the matter is not so serious as all that. We will both try and forget what has happened.”

His face was white and drawn.

“We will forget,” he murmured after her.

“And you will consider me a little, before you,”—she looked about for a word,—“before you pursue us with your friendship, simply because we are English?”

“I will consider you.”

“There shall not be so many invitations to the Élysée. And you will keep away from Meaux, at any rate whenever we are there?”

“I hear what Mademoiselle says.”

“And, above all, you will devise some means to end this party at once—to-morrow?”

“I will devise some means.”

“The Grand Chamberlain will manage it for you,” she remarked somewhat more sociably; “he must have plenty of pretexts.”

“I cannot do it,” he cried, on a sudden casting aside all remnants of his firmness; “I cannot do it; I cannot. I will not forget you. I refuse to promise never to see you again. If you leave me, my heart breaks. Muriel, I love you! I love you!” He seized her hand and covered it with kisses.

For the moment she could think of nothing but this glorious realization of her dreams. The Emperor was

kneeling at her feet. She felt the fever of his lips upon her fingers. It was the manner of fulfilment, so often pictured, destined by the gods.

She made no effort to release her hand; to escape from this embarrassing position. She merely looked at him and wondered. Waiting, doubtless, until he should make an end of demonstration and come to words.

He did not find it quite so easy to master his emotion. When he did look up, she could mark the trace of tears upon his cheeks.

And in his voice.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" he asked; "no answer to my question?"

"What is your question?"

"Muriel, do not torture me. Tell me plainly, will you be my wife?"

"Yes," she murmured.

"You will not repent?"

"No."

"And you love me?"

"— yes, I love you."

"Then I am the happiest man in France"; but his dolorous tones hardly bore out his statement. He made no attempt to kiss her. He was thinking of De Morin and Carache and the Princess Catharine; and at that minute he would have given a good deal to have been back at the Temple, earning a modest fifteen thousand per annum and able to marry whom he pleased.

Let me hear it from your lips again—that you love me," he continued dolefully.

"I love you," she murmured under her breath. It was like the commination service.

"And nothing shall ever part us."

"What should part us?"

"Muriel, you little comprehend the miseries of my position. I never seem able to consult my own inclinations. If I so much as hint that I mean to take some given course contrary to the wishes of my advisers, they immediately threaten me with the most terrible consequences."

"They threaten you, do they?" she cried with flashing eyes.

"Not exactly threaten," he murmured, "but you know what I mean. Now, for instance, in the present case, when I inform Carache that I have chosen my bride"—and he took hold of her hand, and gazed with longing heart into the pale face—"he will look very grave, and declare that the marriage is quite impossible."

She released her hand.

"I do not understand why. I am as—"

"Muriel, Muriel, you do not follow me. You are far above me in everything—everything; but reasons of state, you know—England and France, and folly of that kind. He will oppose your name through thick and thin. He will declare that you are a foreigner and not sufficiently ex— not sufficiently known to the public. I know him, the Misery. He will warn me that I may have to buy your hand at the cost of my throne. I shall part with him; and his successor will adopt identically the same attitude."

"I release you," she sneered, "if you are frightened."

"I will never give you up. I would rather lose my throne."

"There is no need, if only you are bold and resolute. You are Emperor. Be Emperor, then! Do not suffer these men to terrorize you into the position of their servant." It was something to see her with her eyes on fire, her arm upraised, her fragile body quivering with the excitement of her strong will. And as he looked at her, the thought came on him that her shoulders were fitter for the purple than his own.

"Be calm, little one," said he with a resumption of forced gaiety; "all will yet be well. I mean to follow your bidding—who could help but be bold, having such an ally at his back? But we must go prudently, as well. For one thing, you should not breathe a word of our engagement to a living soul until I give you leave."

"How long am I to keep silent?"

"Not long. Promise."

"I promise," very reluctantly: this was hardly in accordance with her notions of boldness and resolution.

"And, Muriel."

"Yes."

"Promise me this, also."

"What?"

"That you will suffer me to choose your acquaintances."

"How can you, when I am in India?"

"You will not go to India. Your father will leave you at the Élysée."

"You are referring to Nicholas Fersen."

"Nicholas!—it maddens me to hear you call him Nicholas."

"Poor fellow, it is his name."

"Once again she was the light-hearted girl who had led him captive that summer night. Her grey eyes sparkled. She touched his arm gently with her disengaged hand.

"I am not going to humour your jealousy, so you need not think it."

"Only this once," he begged. "I will never ask you anything unreasonable again."

"You admit that it is unreasonable."

"If I did, it was a slip of the tongue. You know my opinion of Count Fersen. He—"

"Thank you, we need not discuss that topic. Directly our engagement is publicly announced, you will be allowed to have some say in those matters. Not that I promise to listen to you. Until then, I certainly sha'n't; so you may spare yourself the trouble of trying to convince me."

Lady Framlingham (Madame Verre with her—as they say in the law reports) suddenly hove in sight. She bore down with great promptitude on these two young lovers, who had just come to their first anchorage after a roughish voyage through a deal of dirty weather. His Majesty hardly had time to clear his face.

He transferred his arm from the daughter to the mother, and the four of them made their way into the house. Lady Framlingham evinced no surprise. Nor

did Madame Verre. The former, like the tactful woman she was, expatiated upon the beauties of Pierrefonds, the beauties of the harbour, the beauties of the departing day. While Madame Verre regaled her young companion with little anecdotes about her own vanished girlhood and the disillusionizing which life effects.



## Chapter VI

"When I am—when we are married, I shall do away with this circular boudoir. I do not call it at all pretty," and Muriel looked about her with a critical air. "I cannot think what made the Empress Eugénie prefer it," she went on, to all appearances quite unconscious that her mother and Lady Threpps were only one room in advance; "I cannot indeed. To begin with, the shape is abominable. The light is far from good, and the decoration is hideous."

"It promised to be such a miserable day," her companion replied, with greater regard for any keen ears there might be on ahead. "I do so detest rain. Had I not come across you and your brother in the gallery, I declare I should have gone off to Paris with—with the Verres."

"Yes," said she, lifting a corner of the tapestry to feel its texture," and we shall have to be off to-morrow."

"Oh no," he pleaded.

"We have been here a week," she persisted, "and most of the others are already gone. Besides—"

"Besides what?"

"Nothing, it does not matter."

"Tell me. I hate those half-finished sentences."

"I am sorry."

The sound of her mother's voice growing fainter in the distance quickened her pace. Napoleon ventured to detain her, his hand upon her arm.

"One moment. Mu— Muriel, may I not hope to have half an hour with you this afternoon?"

Her reply was another question.

"When will our engagement be made public?"

"Have I not told you a dozen times?—so soon as it is possible."

"Then why not to-day?"

He gazed at her reproachfully. "I must do nothing until I have seen Carache."

"I thought that you had already asked me to be your wife. Having consented, am I now to await Monsieur Carache's acquiescence before I can consider our engagement final? You ought not to subject me to so humiliating a position."

"Pray, pray be reasonable. Have you forgotten what we said yesterday?"

"I am not likely to forget." Then, resuming her former coldness, "I was under the impression that the Emperor might do what he pleased without consulting anybody. I am wrong."

"Altogether, my dear young lady; as you will discover when you are Empress."

"When I *am* Empress."

"Why, Muriel? Only a few minutes ago you yourself were speaking of our marriage."

"It will never take place," she muttered bitterly; "you are too faint-hearted. I do wrong even to listen to you."

"Let us ask his Majesty," came Lady Threpps's voice through the open doors. "His Majesty is sure to know."

"This is terrible," muttered the Emperor, turning helpless to every corner, like some hunted beast: "they are coming back. Are we never to get five minutes in peace?"

"It is your own fault."

"You are very harsh and cruel. But you *will* meet me this afternoon at three,—where we were yesterday? Deares—Muriel, say that you will."

"I cannot say any such thing. It is far too early in the day for me to tell what I shall do in the afternoon."

But as a matter of fact she found her way to the trysting-place at the appointed hour. Her lover was pacing to and fro across the threshold of the Berceau.

"I thought you were never coming," he cried.

Her face showed plainly that she was not in a pleasant temper. She responded to his smile of welcome with a frown that filled him with astonishment. He dropped his outstretched hand, though not before she had had time to ignore it. He attempted to speak: his voice failed him. His knees commenced to tremble violently. He felt a mind to turn and flee before her wrath, ignorant as he was of the cause of his offending. She did not leave him long in doubt.

"So you have asked my mother to stay on another week?" she began.

"To please you," he murmured. "De Morin has orders to write and beg your father to join us."

"To please yourself," she cried disdainfully.

Her tone roused him from his complaisance. "I do not pretend to understand your moods. I love you; I have told you so a dozen times. I have offered you half my throne; what greater proof could I give? From that moment forward, you have treated me to nothing but your whims and fancies and ill-humours. Do you repent your bargain?—then say so boldly, and you shall be free. Mind, I am not offering to release you. But I will not be a hindrance to your happiness, if you regret your choice: Muriel, I love you too much for that."

He pulled up sharply. Here was he drifting from passionate indignation into sentiment; and he did not want to be sentimental just at present.

"Muriel, you must confess you are unreasonable. You choose to be annoyed because I recommend caution in this business; because I won't make our engagement public until I have had an opportunity of consulting with my ministers. I do n't do you the injustice to suppose that you are not wiser than you pretend to be. You know what a delicate matter this is; that the least imprudence might altogether wreck our future happiness."

"Besides," he continued querulously, "it is for me to be annoyed, not you. Your behaviour, the night of our engagement, with Count Fersen attracted general attention. I was watching you. It grieved me to see how you kept your promise."

"I made no promise."

"At least, you should be more careful of your good name."

"You are careful of it, are you not?" she retorted. Her biting scorn shocked him considerably.

The earlier portion of his address—she had no other name for it—could not convince her; the latter part only served to increase her wrath. These reproaches of his were intolerable: his solicitude for her reputation a bitter mockery. She burst forth into a torrent of recrimination, pouring out the grievances her heart had been feeding on during the last two days. She was in truth a bundle of contradictions. Cold and resolute, and yet a dreamer; and having, like most dreamers, a place within her where wrongs eat their way, by fermentation, until they poison the whole soul.

"You are full of selfishness . . . selfishness and hypocrisy. What do you care for my good name, provided no one endangers it except yourself. It is very well for you to talk of caution and prudence, when all the while you want me to stay on in your house and come down here for clandestine interviews, every bit as though our engagement were publicly known. People notice, you may make your mind easy on that score. Only this morning, the odious Verre woman was good enough to give me a little covert advice. And I am called upon to suffer this, for what reason?—for none except your selfish cowardice. If caution is necessary, why do you keep me here? Why may I not go home and stay there, until such time as you have consulted your miserable ministers? When am I to know my real position? Let me go!" and she shouted as though he really held her; "let me go! I know why you want me to lose my good name. You coward, you do it with a purpose. I believe . . . I believe . . . "; but her lips refused to utter more.

Napoleon heard her coldly to the end. It was an exhibition of worldly wisdom on her part which did not take him altogether by surprise. Nor (strange as it may seem) did it render her any the less lovable in his eyes. But the memory of Count Fersen still rankled in him. He could not get himself to frame a gentle answer; to attempt assuagement which should restore that condition

of grudging tolerance which had marked her since the first avowal of his love.

— “You want to be free,” he said drily.

“That is what you are aiming at, you coward,” she hissed. “Free me, now that you have compromised my good name. One would expect as much from such as you. Fling me off, I say! You have all you ever wanted.” It was a glimpse of that same childishness which Brisson had noticed on a previous occasion. Napoleon could not subdue a faint smile.

“So you fancy that that is all I ever wanted,” he said with greater softness. “My dear child, do you imagine that we evil men care for those sort of triumphs? I never mean to set you free of my own accord. Make me believe that you are really anxious to go back upon your word, and I will let you, though it breaks my heart.”

“I do not want to retract,” she muttered sullenly. “All I desire is some little consideration for my position. Do n’t bring me down here any more to these sort of interviews. Do n’t spend the mornings looking for me. And above all”—and she now looked at him with such entreaty, that he almost dared kiss her—“do not watch me in the drawing-room. You do not wish people to know that I am to be your wife; do not let them fancy that I am . . .” and once more her lips refused to speak her mind. But it was not difficult to guess the unuttered word: it thrilled his heart. It promised a sinister ending that the unspoken thought between them should make him love her all the more.

He carried her hand to his lips, bowing over it with an exaggeration of reverence which pleased them both.

“My darling Muriel,” he exclaimed, employing a solemnity one usually reserves for prayers, “I love you too dearly to harm you. Think me selfish and cowardly, if you will; but not so selfish nor so cowardly that I would not die to shield you from the merest whisper. I have been thoughtless. I love to have you near me. In the mornings I cannot settle to my desk till I have seen you. Indeed, I count every moment lost which is not spent beside you. Can you blame me? I love you so



much, so much. But your complaints are just. In indulging my own deep longings, I forgot you. I did wrong to press your mother to remain on; I did wrong. It is too late, however, to regret that. All I can do now is to show you that I have taken your lesson to heart. I will not seek you out. We will have no more meetings down by this arbour which I love so well. Weak men make great resolves, and bind them with great oaths. Not I. You have heard my simple promise; you can trust it fully. I know that you can trust it; and you know that too."

His voice had reached that selfsame yearning and regret upon it Wednesday, when he had offered an everlasting separation.

"It *will* be a deprivation," said he, smiling pathetically; "I do not pretend to deny it. But I shall be busy. Carache is to be here on Tuesday; I will order him to summon a council for that day. On Wednesday your betrothal shall be publicly announced; and we can get three sweet days in this delightful place. Good-by, beloved, till Wednesday. Say you forgive me."

She still looked the least bit resentful; but she murmured her pardon with a gentleness which left nothing to be desired.

"I shall come here often enough during the next few days," he resumed, full of compassion. "Not that our meetings in this place have been over-happy. On Wednesday we must choose some other spot. What children we were to quarrel. A few calm words, you see, have put the whole matter right. Muriel—Muriel, will you kiss me?"

"Not till Wednesday," she cried. And she started back with a bright laugh, which marked the final dispersal of her displeasure.

"Not one?"

"Not one!"

"And I am not to see you or to speak to you for almost a week? Honestly, I do not know how I shall manage to endure it."

"Please do not be so foolish. Of course you may speak to me. For heaven's sake, do not go rushing into



the other extreme, or people will feel no doubt at all in the matter. What you have to avoid is making me conspicuous by wandering about in search of me. You can't deny that you have done it," and she laughed a second time. "And above all, you must not stand glaring at me for hours together in the drawing-room."

"And your mother?" he asked irrelevantly.

"She may suspect. I have told her nothing."

"There can be no harm in her knowing."

"All Paris would get the news half an hour later."

He looked at her in some surprise.

"My mother is so careless," she excused herself.

"The temptation to gossip is too strong for her." He did not answer, and she added curtly:

"We must be moving."

"The misery begins. Let us say good-bye before we start. Farewell till Wednesday. Will you not kiss me?"

"When Wednesday comes. Quick, I am cold."

Napoleon naturally expected five days of the most abominable torture. He was in the mood for self-sacrifice, and himself gave the rack its first turn. For, immediately upon their understanding, having reconducted Muriel to the house, he summoned Godefroy to inform him that he intended to dine alone. He dined alone. It was a miserable affair,—solitary, uninteresting, having about it no incentive even to refrain from a second help of pudding. He went bravely through it, however; and, with the aid of much black coffee and the sugar-basin, sat far into the night, concocting speeches and proclamations which were intended to inform his ministers and his faithful people of his projected marriage.

And this contribution to his own discomfort fully satisfied him. He felt entitled to leave the second wrench to other hands. Hence, when, the following night, Godefroy asked whether he wished to repeat his solitary meal, he sternly repulsed that faithful servitor. He meant to comport himself during the remainder of his probation as though his guests did not include a certain young lady, whom to look at was a foretaste of heaven.

Surely she was able to inflict the torture without help from him?

And at the outset she did inflict it, behaving precisely as he had anticipated. In the daytime, though he never expressly sought her, he knew she was nowhere to be found. At night, albeit he never actually watched her face, he felt that she remained obstinately unconscious of his existence. When they spoke, it was in frigid monosyllables. He could not realize that they would ever again walk together in that sweet companionship, which, having endured for thirty minutes, had left a lifetime of bitterness behind.

So, Saturday and half Sunday went to swell the tale of wasted days. Forty-eight hours remained to the council, and he promised himself a busy time over his speech and proclamation. He already knew both by heart: they were wonderfully soothing, whatever might be their ultimate chances of success.

But suddenly and inexplicably she relented, herself violating the restrictions which she had laid upon their intercourse. The forty-eight hours aforesaid belied their expectation. He did not go in search of her; but he frequently found her,—either in some deserted gallery or hall, or in the arbour of famous memory. At nights, among his guests, he often felt her eyes upon his face, the expression in them which his own hopes supplied. And whenever, at these times, he spoke to her, her animation seemed to promise as long a conversation as he desired.

He marvelled at her inconsistency, while he took advantage of it. He could not understand it. But he never put it down to the sort of weakness which he was sometimes conscious of in himself, and which made him a man prolific of resolves, but without resolution.

Most men have this common trait, to wit, an indefinable, vague sense of possessing totally different characters in the presence of different people. To enlarge upon such a universal peculiarity would only lead to platitudes. Napoleon possessed it in a marked degree. It came out most forcibly face to face with his future bride. She made him feel a flabby and irresolute

creature, though he knew the strength of his own nature. It could not be that she was the better man. Certainly, the corners of her mouth turned upwards, while his turned down; but he did n't put much faith in physiognomy. Still the feeling worried him.

He had a greater grievance. He commenced even to doubt the wisdom of his choice; though his love burnt with all its old intensity. To tell the truth, he yearned after some small return in kind for all the affection he lavished upon her. She must see that she was always in his thoughts. Away from prying eyes, these thoughts found vent in words of tenderness daily verging more on the inane. And yet she never responded. Sometimes she mocked him. Sometimes she brushed aside these cloying endearments with one cold sentence, and passed on to topics of greater moment.

It could not be that she disliked homage. She was a woman, and his follies bore witness to her charm. Still more preposterous to suppose that she was selfish and greedy and calculating; that she wanted him for his crown, and intended to cut as much as she could of the accessories. But—but—the cruel facts remained, her offhand manner and her coldness, which, in the past, he had found so charming. It was not maidenly dislike. It was not selfishness. Then it must be moral insensibility; that want of depth of soul which brings a man unscathed and childlike through rape and murder. Yes, that was it—moral insensibility! An odious enough trait in malefactors and elderly people, but pardonable in this young girl, whose shallowness was merely want of knowledge. Maternity (he became reverent again) would change all that; maternity, and the lapse of days. Time would teach her how necessary it is to have a conscience—for the offences of one's friends, if not for one's own.

And yet he was not altogether consoled. He longed so greatly for the slightest gleam of tenderness. One word, one single look of affection, the merest sign that she loved him—that was all he wanted. He frequently asked her for it; always in vain. So he was driven to contemplate his own devotion. He expatiated on its

priceless value: it was not too common, he affirmed, a love like this. Given by the humblest beggar to a queen, her Majesty were a fool to spurn it. "Not every lover loves as I love you," he said alliteratively on more than one occasion; "the day may come when you will be sorry that you did not appreciate it": and she always laughed.

At times she charmed him into forgetfulness by her vivacity. But he soon once more remembered. Even her animation had its seamy side. She shone most in the drawing-room, and Majesty soon conceived an ugly suspicion that she desired to show mankind the pattern of his chains. He therefore made their conversations as brief as possible, giving reasons next day in the arbour.

If it were really her wish that men should know, she succeeded admirably. Men did know; and tokens of their knowledge soon reached the lover's ears. Some gardener or lackey must have played the eavesdropper at their interviews. Or, more likely still, the guests could not fail to notice what was sufficiently patent to decent eyes. People commenced to gossip.

First, within the confines of the castle, and with bated breath.

Madame Pontécoulant, one of the new arrivals, grew very friendly in many directions. She took every one aside to inquire anxiously whether there was anything in it. Lady Threpps opined yes. Madame Prehlen, who had come to Compiègne simply to annoy her husband, declared the whole thing to be a fabrication. The Emperor, she maintained, being as good as betrothed to the Princess Catharine, daughter of Peter. Monsieur Prehlen, for his part, did not seem quite so certain. He and Lord Threpps had by now become inseparables. The Norwegian, without specifying Catharine, candidly hinted at a Russian marriage, which, if it were not prevented by untoward circumstances, would benefit the cause of European peace. The servants' hall shared in these suspicions. And from the lower regions it was no great distance to the town, and even less to Paris.

On Monday evening men were talking about it in the clubs and on the boulevards. Tuesday morning, a lead-

ing journal, which was both moderate and friendly, published the rumour and embellished it with comments which were neither. The article found its way into the Palace. Prehlen showed it to Threpps, who passed it to Pontécoulant, who passed it to De Morin, who passed it to my Lord. Uncle and nephew no longer treated the matter as mystery. Napoleon told the Chamberlain everything; and the Count shrugged his shoulders and came to the conclusion that his young master would be cleverer than he had fancied, were this marriage really to take place. So he gave him the attack, without any preliminary innuendo.

Our hero fell in with his beloved quite by accident, that same morning, and the two young people discussed the situation.

"My darling," said he, answering her statement that she had read it, "you must not heed such things."

"I do not," came the composed rejoinder. "But it will make your task this afternoon a very difficult one."

"Never fear. They may take my throne from me; I will never give you up."

"I wish you would not say such foolish things. Where is your spirit? Not a single other sovereign in Europe would talk as you do."

"Muriel, give me a little word of love. Even if you do not feel it, give it me, so that I am—so that I may have courage for this afternoon."

But she did not see her way to yield compliance. Accordingly, he assured her without it that he was panting for the ministerial encounter.

The November sun came pouring through the windows of the Council chamber, onto the green table, surrounded as yet by empty chairs. The room was crowded; and the conversation still hovered round Compiègne, doubtless dreading state questions. Carache, in deep mourning, and with waxen face, stood beside his master. They were chatting gaily. The little one had been dead three days. He did not forget her; but the dead—well, the dead are dead, and the living are still chained and have to work. Pontécoulant, sucking himself as always,



made one of the royal circle. Brisson stood by him; the two, by much craning and straining, caught occasional glimpses of the terrace, the beauties of which Napoleon was pointing out to Carache. Another group, composed of MM. Verre, Petard, Freron, Neil, and Graves, lounged at the second window, looking out upon the selfsame scene; while the Minister of Justice, who somehow was always shunned of his companions, stood within the third embrasure and pretended to be immersed in official documents. These papers never failed him on such occasions; they served to annoy his colleagues, and they mitigated the too obvious pariahdom attaching to his office. For the rest, it may be mentioned that De Morin had loitered about the Emperor's apartments all the morning to receive a summons; Mesnil had gone to Paris to escape one. Neither were present.

"I trust we sha'n't be kept here all day," Verre said, *sotto voce*, to his companions. "I want to get to town by the six train."

"I too," murmured most.

"Have you any notion what the business is?" Verre went on.

"I suspect," said Petard, Minister of Finance.

"Let me hear."

"You were in Compiègne yourself last week?"

"Yes, but I have been to Geneva and back since Friday; I am painfully ignorant of Paris news."

"Shsh, not so loud. Have you seen this morning's *Imperiale*?"

"I never read it."

"You do wrong not to."

"Well, what did it say?"

"Something about an Imperial marriage," replied the Treasurer, bringing his mouth close enough to the window to cloud the glistening glass.

"Hark," from Neil, Public Instruction, "what is his Majesty saying?"

"Nothing of exceptional interest, to judge from the great one's first words.

"Whether the place keeps as beautiful later on in the year is doubtful. Even now, I find it a trifle



sombre; with snow-clouds about, it must become gloom itself."

"But, with all respect," interjected Pontécoulant, trying to keep between the two august heads in front, "does not Octave Feuillet say the contrary?"

"I prefer to agree with your Majesty. Feuillet could only stand Compiègne from the fireside corner; he was not a competent judge."

"But, my dear Carache," rejoined his colleague, "Feuillet had the eye of an artist."

"And I have not," laughed Bonaparte.

"I did not mean that," said the Minister, simulating excessive confusion.

Carache waved Feuillet to one side.

"His Majesty will be back in town on Monday?"

"Yes. My conscience pricks me for having brought you here to-day. My business might well have waited."

"Not mine," Carache, significantly.

"You have business, too; I did not know. Ah, look over yonder,"—and Napoleon lifted his voice so that the whole room might hear him,— "mark that flood of sunlight bathing those distant trees. How beautiful!"

"Beautiful!" from Carache and Pontécoulant.

"Beautiful indeed!" from Verre, and Neil, and Petard, and Graves.

"Delicious!" from the Justiciar, all by himself in the third embrasure.

At that identical moment, while their souls were uplifted to admire the flood of sunlight bathing the distant trees, and their several hearts were softened and subdued, Lady Muriel Mendril, accompanied by her brother, sauntered lazily along the terrace beneath their windows.

A deep silence fell upon them.

Marshal Brisson became crimson. Pontécoulant sucked himself blue. Monsieur Carache puckered his nose, that rippled into a point, while Verre nudged two of his neighbours and smiled at Neil and Graves. The Justiciar, who was a nervous man—the result perhaps of his isolated office—felt sorely tempted to give one poignant, long-drawn howl, after the fashion of some friendless hyena.

Napoleon did not feel conscious of any change of colour; but his heart instantly conceived the most bitter hatred against his beloved. Everything about her came in for a share of his detestation—her careless step, the poise of her head, her easy manner, so supremely unconscious of the nine elderly and faultlessly attired gentlemen who watched her progress with such interest. He felt a craving to be done with her as soon as possible. He turned away, even before the two were out of sight. "Come, gentlemen," he said coldly, "to business if you please."

He moved with a stately stride towards the table. The ministers fell into their place around the board.

"We are here," said Carache, shuffling among his papers, "in response to your Majesty's command. This will not supersede the Council to be held at the Élysée on Monday."

"I am grateful to you, gentlemen. I regret bringing you all this way; and really, now I come to think of it, I don't know that there was any actual need of an extraordinary meeting."

"We are your Majesty's servants," said Carache; "we are always at your disposal."

"I am aware of it," and he could get no further.

His anger had subsided; his beloved was once more his beloved—with qualifications. But he had made up his mind not to broach the marriage project. This should be her recompense for her want of tact. My Lady would have to wait a few days longer. So he cast about him for some important topic to put in its place. For the stubborn facts remained, that this was an extraordinary Council, and the gentlemen had come many miles from Paris. They could not be dealt with with such ease.

"MM. Fréron and Petard," he began in despair, "have consulted together about a new lighthouse to be constructed at Royan, in the Charente-Inferieur?"

The ministers named bowed low, no doubt well pleased at this sudden prominence.

"Would your Majesty prefer that I began?" said the

Premier; and without waiting for a reply he chose a paper from his bundle and cleared his throat.

"I have here a report from the Prefect of Police. It deals with the various plots against the constitution. The moving spirit in them all is the Eurasian Nadez. He and an inner ring of disciples have entered into a definite conspiracy to assassinate your Majesty."

"Why are they not in prison?" shouted the Emperor.

"The rules of the game, my dear master. Nadez has had interviews with Arnold Loog, the Senator, and with General Changarnier. Also," and the Premier went very slowly, "with Prince Felix Bonaparte and Monsieur de Morin."

"The thing is absurd. I will not believe it."

"I can only say that the Grand Chamberlain was closeted with Nadez for nearly an hour yesterday morning."

"But De Morin has not stirred from Compiègne."

"Exactly. Nadez was here in the Château."

"Good God, I am trapped indeed!"

It rose to heaven, a cry of despair, a prayer for mercy. Not a man present but understood its meaning; for it lit up in a lurid flash the soul of this potentate cowering in his chair.

"Sire," said Carache, "the first one of Nadez's gang (including himself) that approaches within a mile of your Majesty shall be arrested."

"At least I may tax De Morin with his treachery?"

"Not if you will be advised by us. We shall guard you. We must get you to sign the warrants," and the speaker selected four papers, which themselves suggested assassination, they were so severe and blue. Napoleon signed Loog's and Changarnier's.

"This for Prince Felix," said Carache.

"He is at Auteuil," murmured Verre, "and engaged on an allegorical picture."

The Emperor signed it all the same.

"Now for De Morin."

"I cannot do it." His words brought a smile to Brisson's face; even the Premier seemed softened.

"I must persist in my request."

"And I in my refusal. You cannot expect me thus to condemn my kinsman and benefactor unheard. The thing is monstrous. Why, I should be confined for forty-eight hours to the Élysée, any moment you or the Prefect thought fit."

Carache put the warrants back into his bundle. "That finishes my business. His Majesty will not speak to De Morin?"

"No."

"Good. The end of next week should see some sort of crisis. Patience, sire; that is all that one needs in these things."

"I will try and be patient."

"We are grateful. So much for Nadez and Company! Sire, we await your orders."

The other ministers followed their leader's example. Such as had indulged in documents laid them on one side; and all assumed attitudes of deep attention, which varied with their various temperaments. Eight pairs of eyes were turned upon his Majesty's countenance. He looked blankly from one to the other: the period of grace had not been utilized. Instead, he had wasted it in angry fears. Here he was, no better equipped than twenty minutes back. Having summoned them for important business, he had no business to impart.

"MM. Petard and the Minister of Marine have consulted about a new lighthouse at Roy—" he stopped abruptly, his face on flames. How he cursed his lack of invention. His next cast proved more successful.

"General Clisserole has put one question to me, which I do not feel inclined to answer without first getting the benefit of your advice. What is to be the language in the law courts?"

"Your Majesty must postpone that matter till Monday. I shall be then in possession of data likely to help us in arriving at a sound conclusion."

There was no help for it; he must bring the Council to an end. The Ministers might think what they would. He started out on this last purpose; and, before he had gone five words, found that he had stumbled into the

matter closest his heart. It is a common habit among weak people.

"Before we disperse, gentlemen, I desire to mention one thing more. At the last Council, you, Monsieur Carache, were kind enough to say that France eagerly awaited my marriage. I have lost no time in acting upon—upon your hint. Gentlemen, I have chosen."

"Sire, we congratulate you from the depth of our souls. We only delay to hear her Highness' name to fling our homage at her feet." He meant a telegram.

"Hum! the lady is not a princess."

"Indeed?"

Napoleon could get no further. It seemed the simplest thing in the world to speak her name (he used to moan it a few weeks back, but that was in the privacy of his own chamber).

"She is not a princess?" the Premier repeated politely. "Whoever the lady may be, without doubt she is charming?"

"She seems to me eligible," answered poor Napoleon. "You gave me the hint, so I had to choose somebody."

"The Princess Catharine would be a most popular selection."

No reply.

"Or the Princess Clothilde of Hesse-Cassel might be had for the asking. She is not beautiful, I admit; but she has enormous wealth. But this lady whom your Majesty refers to,—no doubt she is equally eligible?"

"Marshal Brisson knows her," faintly.

"Not I," responded the bluff soldier; "unless you refer to the daughter of the Earl of Framlingham?"

The Emperor nodded.

"You are quite right," with dying accents; "I have chosen the Lady Muriel Mendril."

He would have given his soul to have been met by a storm of loud-voiced opposition. He would have welcomed a whoop of indecorous laughter. But the terrible silence which was the sole result of this brave announcement turned his heart to stone.

Carache, the ubiquitous, ended his misery.

"We note your Majesty's remarks," said he. "Does this complete your business?"

The other gave a startled "Yes"; he did not catch the drift of the Premier's question.

"Then may I suggest that the Council be concluded? Some of us desire to catch the six o'clock train to town."

"As you please."

"Gentlemen, the Council is at an end."

They rose. Without a look to either side the Emperor passed into his library. The door closed upon him, and Carache sprang into the chair which he had just vacated.

"One moment, gentlemen. Not a word about this. You may take it that the Lady Muriel Mendril will never be Empress. That is all. Good-night, gentlemen; good-night." They filed past his chair out of the room; and as they went, each man bowed to him. Verily, he might just have succeeded to the throne of his fathers, or been promoted, *vice* his Majesty—in the library. Directly the last was gone, he stole up to the Emperor's door and tapped gently.

Napoleon stood in the centre of the room, glaring round him like some wild beast. The Minister drew back in pretended alarm; his master beckoned him forward.



## Chapter VII

"What is it?" tartly.

Carache knew men, and what was the fitting time for what. On the present occasion he went straight to the point.

"Of course, sire, this marriage can never take place."

"Why not?"

"France would not tolerate it for an instant."

"You all say the same thing," groaned his Majesty. "Were I Emperor in aught but name, I would make France tolerate it."

He suffered his anger to dwindle and die away. It never made impression upon these imperturbable adversaries, and only served to put him at a disadvantage. So he flung himself into a chair, and stretched himself almost full length, in utter misery and despair. Not waiting for either command or invitation, Carache laid hold of another. He settled himself quite close to his master. He went so far as to lay a hand upon the Imperial arm, where it was suffered to remain. And when he spoke, his voice adopted a caressing character that breathed of peace.

"I know my master's noble, loving heart. I appreciate all the difficulties of his position; above all, the great loneliness to which he is subjected, and which must lie heavily upon such an ardent nature. Shall I go further?—yes; well, then I will confess that I have long ago guessed his secret. France is ignorant of it; his nearest servants are ignorant of it; aye, his own heart hardly yet has grasped full cognizance; I alone, his faithful servant, have known it for months. I have watched its growth from the commencement. I have watched it, and I have never wondered. The young

lady is indeed charming. No, I never wondered. I knew it would be so, directly after your first meeting in the summer down by the river-side at Meaux." Napoleon started, while Carache's voice lost itself in a trembling whisper, full of tender yearning for that beautiful, vanished time.

"I knew you would come to love one another. I envy you. I envy the Lady Muriel. You are both young, full of poetry and fire; you are, furthermore, united by an ardent affection which will prove itself indissoluble. You cannot exactly marry—what of that? Both of you knew as much, in your heart of hearts, at the outset. And marriage would contaminate and destroy a love such as yours. Ah, yes—need I repeat it?—I know the colour of your mutual affection. I saw its birth at Meaux; I watched its second birth in the ballrooms of the Élysée; I am here to-day to prevent you stifling it and flinging it away. I mean to preside at its apotheosis. You will marry a political bride, as many another sagacious monarch has done before you. You will raise up political heirs, on whom you may bestow just as much affection as you think fit: some of them are sure to be hydrocephalus. Your Empress (let us call her Catharine) will not bother much about your fidelity. The state will take good care of hers. And all this time, the poem of your life pursues its jewelled path. Somewhere, afar from the bustle of your state existence, in Meaux, for choice, where first you met, you and your beloved will spend days of perfect bliss. There shall be children round you to teach you how happy private fathers are;" and his voice broke. "In kings the heart is nearer the left hand. But I have said enough. My dear master, I must bid you good-night. I want you always to remember I have two characters. On the one hand, I am your servant, whom you may dismiss at a minute's notice. On the other, I am a man advanced in years who gives the benefit of a lifelong experience to his dear young lord. Good-night, my Emperor."

All this while his hand had rested in its original position. He moved it down to seize Napoleon's, which he straightway carried to his lips. Then they parted. And

in the corridor the Premier muttered: "That was a good shot about Meaux; really the Prefect is most invaluable."

It would be indeed a pleasant thing to shift the scene a little while, and change the characters. To accompany the Premier to his bedroom, for instance; to see him fling off the minister and bend over his open portmanteau to tend a bunch of faded violets. To behold, eye to eye, with him, the picture which these withered flowers recalled. Two weeks back, upon this very day, his darling had burst into his room, flushed from her walk, bearing this gift aloft. And now she was rotting—but hush, what good could come of that? Oh, ye gods that have promised, beware if we never meet them more! So he lay the violets back among his pocket-handkerchiefs, and replaced the lid. Pleasant again, to follow him as he leaves his bedroom and goes in search of Brisson, his favourite in the Cabinet,—Brisson who listens so well and never contradicts. Pleasant truly; but impossible. For Napoleon still claims the exclusive attention of his chronicler, if of no one else.

The more our hero thought of it, the more he admired Carache's sagacity. It translated into living words what had long held his brain. The beautiful picture seemed quite convincing: he half made up his mind to give it to Muriel at second hand. She would surely acquiesce. But no more business! He must have the air, after this pent-up day. He donned hat and overcoat, and passed into the open by way of his private door.

He suffered his feet to lead him whither they would; half unconscious perhaps of his destination, but not surprised when he found himself once again upon the threshold of the harbour, and face to face with Muriel Mendril. She made no pretence of being there by accident. He did. And commenced forthwith protesting a feigned astonishment to hide a very real anxiety. Not that either seemed necessary: my Lady laughed them both away; and since her mood was unusually gracious, Napoleon did not try to bring them back. They avoided any reference to the Council; possibly each was waiting for the other to begin. Never before had Muriel shown herself so fascinating. She laughed at him and teased

him in a manner that nearly drove him to distraction. He became once more her devoted slave. No form of self-abasement likely to bear witness to the power of her beauty seemed too degrading. He complained that in her presence he was weak and vacillating; and if he did not exaggerate this weakness, it was only because he was not able. He maligned his character from every point of view; and this is the curious part of love,—under its influence, men think about their best points and like to display them, while they speak about their worst.

He was in an expansive mood. He told her of his early life, its trials and disappointments; and for her benefit went over anew the whole marvellous story of his sudden rise to fame. Relate this narrative as often as he would, he always found fresh pleasure in it. He laid stress on all the dramatic touches—his fortunes at their lowest just before the dawn, his meeting with the Brissons, his resolute conduct in the barrack square. “I verily believe it is the most decisive thing I have ever done,” he exclaimed, laughing, not quite believing that she believed it, all the same; “I do indeed. Ordinarily, I am one of the weakest of men—only you must n’t tell my ministers.”

“I sha’n’t tell them.” He did not mark her emphasis: he was not by any means a dull man, but love is blind.

He commenced to fondle his upper lip, after the fashion of the totally shorn. “You can imagine how grateful I am to Brisson and the Grand Chamberlain.” He repeated the same statement in a different form half a dozen times. He wanted to convince himself that the last named of these benefactors was incapable of treachery. Muriel treated this departure with the same childlike unconcern.

“Do you really like Marshal Brisson?” she asked lightly.

“My dear child, what a question. I am afraid you cannot have been listening.”

“He does not seem very intelligent.”

“But, my dear girl, you cannot have exchanged half a dozen words with him.”

"Oh yes, I have." She gave a pert little nod, denoting deep mystery: he thought her absolutely ravishing.

"I know. You have sat next to him at dinner and asked him for the salt. Probably he came to the conclusion that you were a most uninteresting little person."

"Do not be impertinent, if you please." And much more to the same effect, which a veracious chronicler may be excused if he omits.

But before long she appeared to think she had unbent enough for one day. Her manner changed with startling abruptness; the sunshine faded from her face, and its room was taken by those beginnings of hardness which did not promise well for the years to come. He, in duty bound, went with her. His own countenance became solemn and subdued. Alas, with bitter reason. He was commencing to remember Nadez; and the well-grown evergreens along their path were not such sweet companions as they had been on many a former occasion.

They were moving slowly towards the setting sun. Its red glow tinged the whiteness of her face. At least he thought so.

"You have finished with your horrid business for to-day?" she began. A false note at the outset; for he had long ago discovered her character to be eminently business-like. But it did not jar on him: he, too, possessed his little affectations.

"Yes, thank heavens. The Ministers were duller than usual. If Carache does not brisken up a bit, I shall really have to try some one else. Poor fellow—I was forgetting—he has just lost his only daughter."

"That must be the little girl who always rode with him in the Bois. She was pretty, poor child. I pity him."

"I wish he could hear you say so. It would be some solace."

"I doubt it. What can you find to talk about from two to five?"

"We did not meet at two. We were not at the table when you passed underneath the window. That must have been after three."



"I? Under what window?—I have not stirred out of the park the whole afternoon."

"You had to reach it by way of the terrace."

"What has the terrace to do with the Council chamber?"

"The windows let onto the terrace. We were watching the beautiful day; so every one saw you. I felt sorely tempted to call to you to come and take part in our deliberations." He gave a little laugh, meant to signify forgiveness for her indiscretion; and he expected her to join. But she did nothing of the sort. Indeed, a somewhat ugly frown passed across her face.

"I had no idea," was all she said.

"We had enough to talk about," he continued cheerily.

The change was marvellous. She thrust a light hand through his arm: it was a gesture of sudden confidence and warmth.

"You silly fellow, I don't believe you. You men are so self-important. Tell me, what can you have found to keep you from—to keep you busy from three to five?"

"Muriel, you will not be alarmed?" he asked of her in a lugubrious voice.

She became cold again at once. Her nestling hand dropped away.

"There is a plot on foot to take my life," and he faltered and could say no more.

"Is that all? I thought you were going to tell me something terrible."

"My God, is n't this terrible enough?"

"No"; the monosyllable breathed contempt. "You merely share a risk common to all rulers. You princes have better lives than other people; surely it's not too much to expect that you won't be nervous about yourselves? Wait till I am Empress,"—and her eyes kindled, while the whiteness of her face needed the sun no longer,—“they may hatch as many plots as they choose. I shall go everywhere and anywhere. No one shall say that I am afraid."

"I am not afraid. Muriel, you do not love me."

"I have never said so."



"You do not love me. You cannot love me, to speak to me like that."

"I have never said so," she repeated doggedly.

"But I can see. You do not love me as much as my future wife should do."

Then I should not love you at all, her brain murmured.

"I lavish all my heart on you," he went on, falling by degrees into recriminations used before, as is the way with lovers; "I worship the ground you tread on. I am not ashamed to show it. Your return is meagre indeed. I want a more generous one; I will have a more generous one. Were I the poorest wooer in the land, the most powerless, the most wretched, still I would have more. The woman who becomes my wife shall love me as I love her."

These outbursts of his, which promised so well for their married life, always seemed to steel her heart, making her colder and more disdainful than ever. Her lips parted in a scorn there was no dissembling.

"I understand; you want to be free. Your first attempt was unsuccessful: this is the second. I see it all. You were too much of a coward to speak about our marriage to your ministers. You know your timid heart; you are certain that you will never dare,—so you want to be free. Go free! I sha'n't hinder you."

She stopped, and coldly pointed him to go forward and leave her to return alone. She spoke without faltering and without passion.

"Go your way and leave me to go mine. Leave me to go mine. You have done your purpose, what more could you desire?"—once again that schoolgirl touch which made him love her all the more. "The papers have frightened you. I sha'n't ask you to do what you dare not venture of your own free will. If you want a woman who loves you, I want a man. I have found one, too; one who would go to the end of the world for me. You won't be so successful. Try as you may, you will never find a woman to love you. They will all get to know you as I know you, and then they will despise you as I do."

Her bitter incisiveness was wonderful. It contrasted strangely with this jumble of ill-mixed reproaches, which showed that her mind and heart were in the clutches of hysterical passion, if not her manner. He attempted to soothe her.

"Muriel, Muriel, they will hear us in the Palace."

"Let them. They will know what a brave man their master is,—their master, Napoleon IV, the Emperor of the French! Do you mean to persecute me further? Have I not told you that you are free? Leave me, then, to go my way in peace." And once more she pointed him imperiously forward to the forest gates, which were close upon them.

And as he looked helplessly at her, and his eyes marked her face and figure,—neither over-striking, though he found them so,—the thought came to him: what a consort for a great throne. He envied her her indomitable will. With some of it himself, he—but his strength lay in a different form.

A second time she bade him begone. He did not stir. A third command fell equally to the winds. Number four she clothed in language less flattering than she had yet used.

"I thought as much," and she said as much. "You *are* the mean-hearted coward I suspected. You want me to do everything. This rupture is to be my fault; not yours. That is how you propose to salve your conscience, you traitor!"

And then her twenty years flung aside the semblance of self-restraint so long maintained. She lifted her hands quickly to hide her face, and burst into a flood of tears. They were the sweepings of wrath and disappointment and helplessness and despair.

Without a thought for their exposed position, he stepped forward and folded her in his arms. Her hat had already fallen to the ground; she hid her weeping face against his breast. He felt towards her an exaltation of affection that breathed only reverence. It was the first time he had ever held her to him. And, with love like this, the last. The kiss upon her brow might

well have lingered there forever; it was the only unsullied one she ever got from him.

"My little Muriel," he whispered, "what will become of us if we cannot learn to lean on one another. Nothing shall part us, O my heart. Hear me swear it. I cannot live without you."

Free again, she suffered him to keep her arm and lead her forward with every sort of endearing epithet. Only now and then a sob would keep breaking to the surface to remind them both of their encounter.

They needed none. Neither meant to trip again. She held his arm with just enough of clinging to put him once more in good conceit with himself and make him forget her bitter words. At the park gates, when he wanted to proceed a little way into the forest, she held him back, with still an occasional sob, and bade him consult his own safety. But he would not hear of danger, answering her—quite unconsciously—with her own words, that princes have so good a time, the least they can do is not to be nervous about themselves. She yielded, though she did not seem convinced. And he led her forward along one of the many forest roads. On his side he humoured her with a full account of the late Council. He gave her details of the plot, evincing great merriment when every now and then she nestled closer to him with a tiny shiver or peered nervously into the deep shadows of the trees.

He dilated next, and with considerable humour, upon the personal peculiarities of his ministers. The saturnine Brisson, against whom my Lady had a curious prejudice; the Justiciar, shunned of all his colleagues; Verre's repeated snubbings. None escaped. Carache's foibles came in for the severest handling. Napoleon jested about his jealousy. Each Council resolved itself into a species of harangue from the Prime Minister. The word was always with him. Whoever tried to seize a syllable rued his temerity. In the midst of this last description, which Muriel appeared to enjoy immensely, the Emperor suddenly bethought him what causes he had to love Carache. He did not mention that point, though. He told her everything else—everything which happened,

and a little that did n't. For he ventured to touch the marriage question.

It was thin ice, but he crossed it very skilfully.

"Personally, none of the ministers see any objection. Pontécoulant welcomed it. He said that it would lead to more cordial relations with England. Monsieur Carache also showed himself exceedingly agreeable."

She was drinking in every word.

"Do you know the Prime Minister?" he asked.

"I have met him. He is an acquaintance of my father's."

"Ah! After all, he is a charming man: he has a deep heart. He congratulated me warmly. Kind, was it not? One must remember in what trouble he is. Men do not usually regard the happiness of others when they themselves are plunged in woe. He said that he considered me a fortunate man. Apparently he admires you."

"Does he?"

"And Marshal Brisson as well—"

"Did *he* congratulate you?"—there again was that hateful note of coldness.

"Certainly he did, more warmly than any one else. He spoke of you in very flattering terms. You seem to be quite famous already."

"Ah."

"But it is needless to specify further: their warmth was absolutely unanimous. Every one had some pretty little speech."

"I thought Monsieur Carache suffered no one to speak except himself."

"What a suspicious little woman you are. They made their remarks after the Council was at an end."

"I see."

"So far everything is very satisfactory."

"Very. But why did you not tell me this to start with?"

"You never asked me."

She made a little movement of impatience. "You know how important it is that our engagement should be published as speedily as possible. And it is not like you to keep back good news when you have any."

He patted her hand with a complaisant smile.

"Let us turn," she said.

"I am afraid," faltered Napoleon, "we shall not be able to make the matter public just yet a while. The Premier cautions prudence. He gave me his reasons with great frankness. Let me repeat them." He had to pause for a short time to discover what they were.

"For one thing, Nadez's plot stops the way. We must squash it, and have the Eurasian under lock and key, and Changarnier as well, and Loog, and De Morin, unless he can clear himself," with the dispassionate light-heartedness a man uses in speaking to his mistress about his benefactors. "You must not breathe a word of these things. The Emperor's wife is himself. The trouble will come to a head early next week. We are merely waiting to see whether we can get any other leading people into our net."

"Does it please you to discover that your chief men are traitors?" she asked, with some disgust. The jaunty manner at once changed. He gazed more in sorrow than in anger at the hardening road.

"I am bound to protect myself."

He resumed the flow of Carache's reasons with a chastened spirit.

"The Chamber meets on Monday after this week's recess. The Premier desires the opportunity of feeling their temper. Then, there is a third point: he wants your father's appointment to be definitely announced. Lord Threpps says that the viceroyalty is practically his. The news of it will give my bride an added prestige."

She smiled. This last was a skilful stroke skilfully delivered.

"My darling won't have to exercise very much more patience. Ten days is the outside limit. Eleven days from now the world shall know that I am the happiest man it holds."

He squeezed her arm, and she gave him, in return, just the faintest touch of a responsive pressure; at any rate, enough to thrill through his frame. So he went on to fabricate lies which were quite gratuitous, and which



would merely result in depriving him of pleasures he might bitterly regret.

These were among them.

"M. Carache expresses himself as most anxious that, during this very difficult time, no word of scandal should attach itself to your good name. He does not think much harm has been done so far. But he gives me a deal of advice as to my future conduct. According to his views, I ought not to be with you now. I can't help it; I could n't deny myself just one last interview. After to-day, however, I mean to obey him to the letter. We are not to meet in private. In public we are not to exchange so much as a good-morning. I am to move about as though you did not exist. I am not to be too cordial to your mother. You are to be permitted to depart on Saturday; while I, poor wretch, must remain till the Monday following. And from Saturday forward, we are not to meet again until we are publicly betrothed."

She kept nodding a satisfied assent to this rule of life.

"You must introduce me to Monsieur Carache," she said, as though he, too, would find her irresistible. "I am sure I should like him."

Napoleon suddenly recalled the night at Jervis's Restaurant.

"But you know him. I have seen you dining in his company."

"Then I have forgotten him," she answered, with great composure. "Certainly he has never called upon us since we have been in Paris."

"But is he not a friend of your father's? You said so just now."

"Oh, poor father has many friends."

Poor Bonaparte was positively wet. He remembered now that the Minister had never once referred to his acquaintanceship, though he had done all the talking at the late interview. Surely, Muriel must see through his lies.

But she did not seem to. She smiled placidly and repeated her previous statement:

"If I have ever met him, I forget the occasion."



Our hero breathed once more.

"He spoke a little about the ceremonial," he went on. "The merest mention—you understand. We rather think that after the proclamation there ought to be a grand reception at the Élysée, for me to present you to some of the leading people. That would be Saturday week."

Her eyes glistened. This was what she liked; what she had long dreamt of beside the sea at Sidmouth, in days when her coming king stood shadows only.

"The only thing is," he went on with real solicitude, "it will be a big occasion, and I should like you to be easily first among the throng of well-dressed women."

"I can manage that," she answered.

Busy as they were with these sweet fancies, they did not notice how far they had gone into the forest. The night was creeping in upon them. They grew silent amid the universal stillness. On both there fell that calm sobriety of judgment which reaches men amid the falling shadows. Just as their path stretched clear in front of them, the broad white path, its muddy ruts hardening with rime, so lay the remaining road of life before their eyes. They saw an existence neither so glorious nor so happy as they had fancied, but happy and glorious enough. So these two contented beings moved forward, full of hope and confidence, into the unknown. Moved by some common impulse, both quickened their steps, anxious to pursue a little farther this road which seemed never-ending. Its appearance proved deceptive. A few yards on it turned abruptly and took its way across a circular clearing some two hundred paces in circumference. In the centre stood one of those numerous hunting-pavilions which dot the forest. Its door lay invitingly open, and both door and windows poured forth a flood of light that reached even to the belt of trees. Their way ran directly underneath the portal of this fairy building. The Emperor declared that it should be the limit of their walk. Both were filled with pleasurable excitement. There seemed something so weird, so fairy-like, in the adventure. This clearing in the depth of the forest; its smooth lawn of turf and dying leaves that

felt like velvet to their feet; and the dark lines on every side, most ghostly where the light touched them.

The girl sprang up the steps.

"Shall we enter?" she cried to her companion.

"As you wish. No, stay—there may be some one within."

"What of that?" she said, with all the lightness of a child. He followed her, infected by her spirit.

But on the threshold she hesitated, and—the delight of it!—clasped his arm with both her own.

"Suppose—suppose there is danger?—Nadez!—had we not better get home?"

His Majesty began to feel very uncomfortable.

"Pooh, Nadez cannot come to Compiègne. There is nothing to fear," and he pushed boldly through the half-opened door.

They found themselves straightway in a well-sized hall, which swallowed up the lower story. A bronze cluster, lit by electric light, hung from the ceiling of dark polished oak. The walls, of the like material, were heavy with rusting armour, and antlers, and trophies of the chase. Easy-chairs, and skins, and luxurious couches lay about in Oriental profusion. A massive table, directly underneath the chandelier, gave at a glance the history of these brilliant lights in a house that was clearly empty. It groaned under a picturesque assortment of silver teapots and milk-jugs, teacups of egg-shell pattern, and bearing the Imperial cipher, and dishes filled with cakes and bread and butter. The hunting-lodge, then, had been the goal of this afternoon's excursion. Lord and Lady Threpps, Lady Framlingham, the Prehlens, the Grand Chamberlain, and the rest of that elegant company, had had their tea within these walls half an hour back. Here was the débris.

Muriel found the incident enchanting. She poured herself some tea from the massive silver, and complained because the resulting beverage only suited the hottest summer day. She gobbled *petit fours*, giving her lover bread and butter. It nearly choked him; he was beginning to feel the least bit sick. Never before had she shown such gaiety, such an abundance of animal spirit. She

asked a thousand questions, and did not wait for a single answer. She moved from one end of the hall to the other, fingering the horns and hanging spears. Once she ran lightly up the creaking staircase which led to the second floor.

All the while, Napoleon lay back in an easy-chair, watching her vivacious movements. A silence had fallen upon him; and when he did succeed in breaking it, it was with shaking voice.

"Muriel," said he, "come and rest yourself. We must be moving directly."

Her docility was marvellous. The chair she chose stood so close to her lover's side that she towered above him as he lounged at his ease. Her knees touched the velvet elbow of his own. His right hand swung lifeless from his side, with knuckles that swept the floor. He was literally at her feet.

"My dear child," and he spoke with averted gaze, "how I envy you your cheerful spirits. For my part, I feel depressed and tired out."

"That is a pretty compliment."

"With business, I mean. This last hour has revived me a little; but one takes a deal of reviving after nine hours' hard labour."

"I don't believe a word of what you say. Nine hours! It is my impression you sleep all the mornings." She leant forward laughing, and lightly touched his drooping head with a caressing gesture.

"Ah, Muriel, you and I will never be as happy again. We shall remember this little adventure of ours long hence, when the cares of state hang heavy on our shoulders."

"Goodness me, you are never five minutes of the same mind. Just now you said you were weary to death."

"So I was—just now. Yes," he pursued, "we shall remember this, one day, and regret it. How happy we should be living in the depth of this forest, far from the worry of the world. This should be our home, this hunting-lodge as it stands, without alteration or addition (only my little wife should see that the tea-things were

put away by six). Here we would live year in, year out, perfectly contented with one another's love, perfectly happy, rearing our little ones"—he fell into the reverential tone men adopt towards their unborn offspring—"to become brave and strong and true. When I was a disappointed man, not so long ago, over in accursed England, I imagined nothing could be worth having except fame. The night I saw you first, I added you to the tale of things I longed for. Now that I know fame and you, I want you, and nothing else."

"Come," she said coldly, "we must be moving home."

So they picked their way homeward among the dying leaves, silent and fretful, both of them. The Palace windows shone forth a welcome. The blaze of light hardly served to increase their cheerfulness. They crept towards the private door. Muriel pushed through first. They went together by the rooms which had formed the private suite in the last reign. The girl surveyed them with no friendly eye. Once she exclaimed peevishly: "I shall do away with this circular boudoir when I am—when we are married."

## Chapter VIII

The Honourable Charles Mendril sat at home eating his dinner in a state of solitary splendour. He was also in an exceedingly bad temper. For thirteen days had he been brooding upon the vagaries of royalty. The Emperor knew him, and knew that he proposed to become an attaché at the British Embassy. Why, then, did Majesty forget to invite him to Compiègne? The Grand Chamberlain — that old hypocrite De Morin, with his lies and his grimaces — stood equally well informed. Why did he not suggest such an invitation? Walter received one. He needed it more than Walter. He had his way to make in the world: not but that he felt competent to make it without assistance from foreign potentates. Still, every little helps. His brother's case went on altogether different legs. His path stretched smooth in front of him, right up to the gloomy portals of the Mendril Mausoleum. Why was he in Paris at all, taking the bread out of the mouth of a future ambassador in this disgusting way, when by rights he ought to be engaged in giving his support to the Ottery hunt or arranging next year's fixtures for the Tipton Barmecides? Some men wanted everything; Walter, among them. He enjoyed the reversion to the title; surely he might be satisfied with that. As a matter of fact, the selfish fellow was consumed with jealousy lest his cleverer younger brother should sprout into the Lord John Russell of the family. Hence his abominable behaviour. The Honourable Charles hated him for it.

But if the Honourable Charles detested his brother, what must the Honourable Charles have felt towards his sister? To begin with, she was a miserably useless girl. Who invites miserably useless girls to Compiègne? But the conditions under which that invitation has been

given, as it subsequently appeared, turned this absurdity into a disgrace. Charles, as became a diplomat, got wind of most things some twelve hours after everybody else. The scandal, lately arrived in Paris, had filtered through to him. His friends at the Embassy, full-budded young attachés, and nice fellows, though unintelligent, began to stop dead in the midst of exciting conversations whenever he showed his face. He knew what that meant. And to crown all, he had just procured yesterday's *Imperiale* and had digested its insulting leader before sitting down to his meal.

The Grub Street hack, the author of it, knew how to sharpen the thorn. The reptile actually described the young lady as "of good birth enough for ordinary purposes." His sister "of good birth enough for ordinary purposes"! His sister! and he, who intended to use diplomacy merely as a stepping-stone, meant to be the great patrician premier of the twentieth century! The man spoken of by Macaulay, sought in marriage by princesses, worshipped by all. The man who, fearing neither his own order nor the people, would give to each its due. The man who would steer the ship of state with every spar intact through that terrible tempest which is to devastate this planet in the course of the next forty years, and which will most obligingly overwhelm a few political leaders and kings and emperors and nations, in order to set off the magnificence of the Honourable Charles. "Good birth enough for ordinary purposes"! But what can you expect where a fool of a girl is concerned? She would drag them all through the mud yet, and put him back some five years in his career. It served his parents right. It came as a meet punishment for their foolish indulgence. Muriel had been petted and spoilt and given way to in everything—here was the result. If it broke their hearts, they only had to thank their own stupidity. As for Walter, the Tipton Barmecides were always there for him to fall back on. But the thing seemed d—ish hard on the Honourable Charles himself, who never approved this visit to Compiègne, and, moreover, had his way to make in the world. It was worse than hard; it



was criminal. The lot of them went their own selfish courses, following out their jealousies and — and — and their lusts, never remembering that it was their chief duty to make an elegant background for the great patrician premier of the twentieth century.

But the task would be unending to attempt to put on paper the various shapes taken by his ill-humour. Those above set forth are a feeble sample. For the rest, face to face with this his twelfth solitary steak, his mood was blacker and his heart fuller of angry hatred than it had been any of the eleven preceding days which had elapsed since their departure.

A servant broke in diffidently upon his reflections to inquire of Monsieur Charles whether my Lord returned that night from England. Monsieur Charles did not know, and he did not hesitate to say so without any of those qualifications to ignorance that filial anxiety might have been expected to suggest. The words had scarcely left his lips when the door flung open and Lord Framlingham appeared, a veritable living reply.

The Earl bore on him all the signs of travel. Still enveloped in his long ulster, a rug about his shoulders,—a want of courtesy which Charles bitterly resented,—he seemed to introduce a cold whiff of the Channel. He looked gloomily at the wide expanse of table-cloth.

“So you have the place to yourself,” said he, in a voice that did not belie his looks.

“Yes,” replied the young man, making faithful copy of his father’s manner, and not leaving his steak for a single instant; “the others are at Compiègne.”

“I know,” muttered my Lord. “Marc-Antonin, a knife and fork. He flung his coverings wearily to one side,—another breach of decorum which jarred considerably on the Honourable Charles,—he passed his hands through his hair (yet a third), then seated himself at the opposite end of the table, facing the patrician premier of the twentieth century.

The son sat moodily drumming his fingers on his plate, waiting with no good grace until his father should be level with him, and they might start fair upon the pudding. Both were equally taciturn.

"There, take it away," said my Lord at last to Marc-Antonin. "Well, Charles, you may congratulate me. I have secured the appointment."

The young fellow thawed at once. His father was not such an incompetent after all. He would throw up the attachéship, and go out as the Viceroy's private secretary. Muriel must be cut adrift as quietly and speedily as possible. She might keep her Emperor, and the whole of France as well, if she chose.

"I congratulate you, father, most heartily. Did you have any serious competitors?"

"I am sure I do not know. I saw the Prime Minister on Monday, and he told me that he had submitted my name."

"When do you start?"

"I cannot tell you." My Lord did not partake of his son's suddenly acquired eagerness for conversation. He had communicated his news; that was sufficient. "I cannot tell you," he repeated drily. "Mr. Rodenham does not know himself. There seems some confusion as to the date from which Rocheberie's resignation is to take effect."

"Father," said the young man a few minutes later, with a most engaging show of filial diffidence.

"Well?" My Lord looked fixedly at the treacle in his coffee-cup. This reception was not encouraging. Charles, however, persevered. The Viceroyalty justified a certain amount of geniality, even though it went unrequited.

"Father, I want to throw up the service." He expected a volley of surprised remonstrances. He found himself disappointed.

"You must do as you please. But may I ask what is the meaning of this new move?"

"You are going to India. That is a better chance for me than vegetating as a third secretary in Paris all my life."

"Oh, that 's it, is it? I am afraid Walter must have first choice. And I cannot take you both."

"Why not? Walter can be your unpaid secretary; *he* does n't want the money."

"It is useless asking me my reasons. I should be quite glad to take you, my dear boy. But if your brother elects to come, you cannot. Except as a visitor, of course."

"I suppose Mr. Rodenham wants the place for one of his nominees," Charles said sulkily.

"That is not your business. I am not in a mood to argue the matter. You must therefore kindly desist."

"And if Walter refuses?"

"Then you may have his place. I should advise you, however, to stick to the profession which you have chosen. No man ever did any good by chopping and changing about."

Here was the Honourable Charles's opportunity. He promptly embarked upon that topic which, of all others, he always found the most fascinating.

"To tell you the truth, sir, I do not propose to make diplomacy a serious profession. I want to stay at it four or five years to acquire a little experience and knowledge of the world, and then I shall abandon it for political life."

"Walter will have my interest in the Honiton division," said the Earl cheerlessly.

"I do not expect anything else,"—and in his heart he cursed his elder brother. "Forgive me for mentioning it, there are other constituencies beside the Honiton division." This was carrying coals to Newcastle with a vengeance, or in other words, treating his father to a taste of the well-known Mendril chill. "The Mendrils can be very severe when they choose," was a frequent saying round about Tipton-St.-John.

His father made return with another celebrated commodity (not quite so rare as the other), to wit, a dose of well-merited parental contempt.

"Do n't be a young donkey. Come upstairs to the drawing-room. Heigho! I am dead sleepy. I shall get to bed betimes, I know. I was at Rodenham's last night until close upon twelve o'clock."

A single flickering jet lit patches of the drawing-room. The very sight chilled them to the bone. "Ugh!" cried his Lordship, withdrawing his head the second after he

had put it in, "this won't do. Let's try the study." They tried the study; but the Earl had not been expected home till Saturday. The library was no better. Charles did not possess a sitting-room,—an additional grievance in the eyes of this much-aggrieved individual. At last they were compelled to order a fire in Muriel's boudoir, as being the smallest and the most easily warmed. And they sat themselves down among her cushions and her knick-knacks in an even less desirable frame of mind than heretofore.

But the fire burnt up brightly. The pink shaded lamp cast a softened light over the room: it illuminated Lord Framlingham's benign countenance, shining down upon them from over Muriel's mantelpiece. The Original lit a cigar and surveyed his likeness thoughtfully. The cheerful surroundings soon took effect. "I shall be glad to have my little girl home again," he murmured.

The younger man at once fell in with his softened mood. "This is my view," he began pompously, apropos of his boots, which were large, and patent-leather; "if a fellow has no expensive tastes and a fair amount of brains, he can easily manage to take up politics as a profession. After all, the diplomatic service is fearfully overdone. I might remain a secretary for years, and never rise above a legation all my life. Besides, to get a decent embassy, one must have a private income. But if one has a private income, I do not see why one should not try the House. There, at least, a fellow gets a fair field and no favour; and provided he can speak and keep his head cool, he will go far. Now, with Aunt Mary's legacy and my allowance, I shall have sufficient for my modest requirements. What I mean to do is this: I shall throw up the F. O. and come to India, either as one of your secretaries or in a private capacity. I do n't mind which it is. Indeed, the latter for preference. For then I can travel about and study the Afghan question, and the Pamirs, and native matters generally. Five years of that sort of thing will prove invaluable; it brings a man to the front. I daresay I shall get the *Times* to insert some signed articles of mine. Rupert Gherkin did; and he is only a year senior to me. I shall

return home and put up at once for Parliament. Gherkin will help find me a seat. He says there is still plenty of room for men of good birth who have the gift—ahem—of the gab. Look how he has got on: I don't find him so very clever. I think I can fairly claim to be a better speaker. My Bright recitation at the Eton speeches made a great impression. Who was the old gentleman who had heard Bright, and who said that mine surpassed the original? I always got full houses at the Union. And the fact that I was president will help my candidature. Gherkin says so. Once in the House, I shall go dead slow ahead. For the first two seasons no one shall hear the colour of my voice. I shall be assiduous at committees and that sort of thing; and I sha'n't miss the tiniest division. To do that, I must have a small flat down Westminster way. Of course, I should prefer to live at home; but you are so seldom in town, and it would hardly be worth while keeping the house up for me. I mean to live very modestly,—make the drawing-room my library, and that sort of thing,—and I never intend to budge. A fellow can live very cheaply, provided he never budges. Honestly I believe," he ended in a great burst of triumph, "by following the life I have sketched out, I shall become a great Parliamentarian—of course, in time."

"Of course, in time," said the father. And this was all he did say; for his son's prophetic autobiography had sent him off into a doze, which only half lifted to add this dry amen.

Nothing daunted, the Honour—the Right Honourable Charles proceeded to a minute description of his daily life. He gave the hour at which he meant to rise; what he would eat and drink so as to insure the greatest amount of work from a body that was to be kept on a minimum of sleep and exercise; how he intended to map out his days; and half a hundred points connected with regimen,—points which ambitious youth may think and write about in their diaries, but which they should be careful not to discuss in the presence of elders: it awakens sad memories. From the tending of his body he passed by natural and easy stages to a forecast of his



views upon political questions. How he proposed to be an Imperialist and yet not a jingo; a labour-man full of compassion for hardship and poverty, but in no way a little Englishman or communist; both of them attitudes which (as he was careful to assure his father) had not so far been successfully assumed by any leading statesman. In a word, every one was to make himself hoarse acclaiming a certain process, which, before the Right Honourable Charles Mendril, M.P., First Lord of the Treasury, had burst into the firmament to remain there forever, like the moon of or belonging to Joshua, had been known by the less complimentary description "facing both ways." Not but that this process is in vogue at present. But its chief exponents rest content with the loaves and fishes. They can do without the shouting.

Thus far the dreams of ambitious youth. The Earl, provided he listened at all to these outpourings, must have regretted his uniform indulgence towards his children. But he gave no sign of having heard a word, save for a single glance (made with contracted pupils), which may be credited with going some way into the young man's soul. But at length, in the midst of a dissertation upon the decline of oratory, my Lord took upon himself to move the closure. He proposed the motion, and carried and enforced it, at one swoop.

"When does your mother return from Compiègne?"

"Saturday, I fancy. They don't deign to tell me the actual date. They appear to be enjoying themselves vastly."

"It is the end," soliloquized my Lord, and he heaved a sigh of satisfaction. "Thank heaven, we shall be gone from here by Christmas. I wonder what Muriel will say to India," he continued, softly smiling. "She will be content with nothing under two elephants, I'll be bound, and tiger-hunts by the dozen. That child ought to have been a boy: her pluck and resolution would have fitted her."

"I am sure I wish she had been one," Charles said angrily. He resented any tampering with his prerogative.

His words, no less than the manner in which they were uttered, jarred visibly.



"What do you mean?"

"I do not think my mother ought to stay two weeks at Compiègne. People are commencing to say unpleasant things."

"Unpleasant things about whom? Tell me at once; I insist upon knowing."

Framlingham had sprung out of his lounging-chair. He stood glaring down at the patrician premier. The latter, however, was no coward. His sullen temper, kindling to white heat under these menacing gestures, forbade retreat.

"I will tell you. You need not stand over me in that theatri—in that way. Read the *Imperiale* for yesterday morning; and spare me the sicken—the details."

Lord Framlingham turned and tugged at the bell. "Yesterday's *Imperiale*!" he shouted. Then, when it came, he thrust the paper into Charles's hands.

"Find me the passage, quick!"

He read it through, standing, and with much deliberation. Next, sinking once more into his chair, fell into musings which his son did not venture to disturb.

"Have you more to add?" he asked presently.

"Only the merest gossip."

"So people have begun to gossip?"

"Yes," the Honourable Charles was fain to admit.

"What do they say?"

"They say that the English visitors at Compiègne have become fixtures. Also, they repeat passages from the leader."

"Anything else?"

"On the boulevards they begin to call him 'the Englishman.' I do n't recollect anything else—oh yes—"

"Well?"

"I was at the theatre Tuesday: I heard a man remark that 'Milord' was too wise to show up at the betrothal."

"Continue."

"The curtain went up and I heard no more."

My Lord dragged his chair up to the fender to huddle over the fire. Charles could scarce endure the silence

that ensued. In a way it frightened him: he had looked for quite other results from his communication.

He was squat and sallow and blotchy, was Charles, and of a sanguine temperament; and his main object at present was to shelve this unpleasant matter with the least possible delay. Muriel had got herself into a questionable position; she had caused them to be talked about; and had made his chosen career impossible. Very well, she might go the whole hog. After all, the "whole hog" was not so very disagreeable. She would have plenty to eat and drink, and good clothes and a nice house. An affectionate brother could surely survey her future without justifiable concern. As for himself—well, the mishap had its uses. He preferred India, in any case. His sister's *liaison* with an emperor would invest the whole family with a mysterious prestige, besides accounting for that expression of deep-seated melancholy, which was to be a noticeable trait of his when he became First Minister of the Crown.

Accordingly, what the Honourable Charles wanted was an outburst of passionate wrath that should sweep up all the Framlingham belongings now in France, Muriel excepted, and transport them then and there to Government House, Calcutta. But this brooding and shivering over the fire? At no time ought a strong man to shiver and brood; least of all when the occasion called for immediate action. It called so now. The Honourable Charles had settled the whole thing in his own mind: the offending member must be promptly lopped off.

He did hope that there was to be no "strong arm" business; no hand held out to succor stumbling feet; no retreat which carried all its wounded with it. He had small patience with such folly, followed, as it would most assuredly be, by the jeers of Europe, and subdued garments and an interesting convalescence at Simla.

So he broke into a string of querulous murmurings.

"I must say, it shows a great want of consideration, to get us all talked about in this way. I do not mind so much for myself, but it is confoundedly hard on you and mother. She really should remember what she owes to

you two, and to Walter and to me. But I foretold as much. Girls are so silly and thoughtless. I don't suppose she means any harm, but she is like the rest of them. And this is the pretty pass to which her want of thought has brought us; our name derided by every har—lounge on the boulevards! It is monstrous! Mother must bear most of the blame. She ought never to have gone. And Walter—what can he have been thinking about all this time? Had I been there, and seen this trouble arising, I should have put my foot down pretty promptly. Yes, even if the need had come to beard Majesty himself. Though, mind, I should have approached him in a very politic manner. 'Sire', I should have said, 'pardon my presumption. What is fun—amusement to you is death to my sister. I owe it to my father and to my own future to see that this foolishness goes no further. We may not be emperors, but we are strong enough to defend the honour of a kinswoman.' He would not need any more."

"For heaven's sake spare me more of that rubbish. Be a good son and hand me over the time-table. No," he groaned, running his eye along the top of the page leading to Compiègne, "there is no reaching there to-night. Better so, I suppose; it would only make matters worse."

"You are going there to-morrow?" the son asked dubiously.

"By the first train."

"Ah. I shall be off to bed. Good-night, father."

"Good-night, my boy. Sleep well."

The fire burnt all the brighter for the departure of the Honourable Charles. The pink-shaded light pursued its even course without faltering; and Muriel's father, surrounded by her pictures and her treasures, let his mind wander off some few months forward to a certain realm, whereof the ruler might and would love his daughter without scandal or reproach.

## Chapter IX

The morning, however, brought a number of obstacles, all of which had to be surmounted before Lord Framlingham could get to the Gare du Nord. There were letters from Mr. Rodenham and the India Office, requiring detailed and separate and immediate replies. At eleven, an English prince, travelling southward, put in an appearance and stayed an hour. Threpps followed. The British Ambassador, having heard of his predecessor's good fortune, had dropped in to ask for a little advice. He gave place to Louis de Murinac, who had come up all the way from Avize to request his brother-in law to send him an eye-witness's account of Pondicherry, to form a colonial appendix to his *magnum opus*. So it was past lunch-time before the Earl departed, and quite dark when he stepped out onto the threshold of the Palace. The Grand Chamberlain happened to be crossing the Salles des Armes as he arrived. The old fellow started back in pleased surprise. Then he proceeded to welcome him warmly, clasping both his hands within his own.

"Here you are at last," he cried. "Thirteen days late and just in time to take leave; but here all the same. His Majesty *will* be glad to see you. My lady, as well; indeed, all the guests: we do n't get many viceroys down at Compiègne. This way, your Excellency. They are all of them in the forest. Simple country pleasures, you see,—early to bed, early to rise, and plenty of healthy exercise and nourishing food. Ah, this must be Madame's room. Empty, you observe. They shall know of your arrival, directly they return. But"—and De Morin dropped his voice in deep sorrow—"the party breaks up on Saturday. Only two nights at Compiègne—you, the most honoured guest! Your dear ones have benefited

by the change to a marvellous degree. You are bound to notice it. Muriel looks charming. I must not interfere with you a minute longer. I am so overjoyed to see you, really I cannot help chattering."

By this time the Chamberlain had got my Lord well into the centre of his wife's apartments. With his eyes resolutely fixed on the latter nobleman's face he backed himself out of the room, closing the door gently, but also very firmly. Perhaps he feared lest this welcome and long looked for guest might burst forth to scour the Palace in rather too premature a fashion.

His presence of mind met its fitting reward. He left Madame's threshold to stumble upon the vanguard of the returning guests, a group of cheerful and simple foresters, still busy with the beauties of the late sunset, and the marvels of the health-giving air. Prehlen came first, his hand lovingly on Lord Mendril's shoulder: the Ambassador was talking about the cholera. Lady Threpps, bereft of her lord, Madame Pontécoulant and Lady Framlingham, followed close upon their heels. De Morin was able to touch my Lady's arm. She started; and he, making no attempt to hide his great anxiety, whispered her that the Earl had come. She was a woman of ready comprehension and some spirit. She did not delay to thank him for his warning, but went off straightway to beard this lion in her den.

De Morin, on his side, made direct for the Imperial library. He found Godefroy hovering about the threshold, who informed him that the Emperor had not budged since noon. Napoleon sat at his desk writing assiduously. He did not appear to relish the old gentleman's intrusion. He motioned him silently to a chair. Then, having searched the ceiling for vanished threads, resumed his task. "Scratch," "scratch," ran his ready pen; filled sheets littered his desk, and even bathed his boots. He looked pale, and worried, and full of energy. Presently he put his name with a final dash at the foot of a page, and laid his pen upon the rack, gratefully sighing. He gathered up his precious documents, sorted them, tied them into a neat bundle, and locked them



away. Only then, after these separate processes were duly completed, did he turn to inquire the other's business.

"Sire, the Earl of Framlingham is here."

The Emperor reddened. Against his will he reddened; and being conscious of it, reddened even more.

"I hope you have made him very welcome," said he, with much unconcern. "I fear his visit to Compiègne will be exceedingly short."

"His stay in France will not be much longer. I hear for certain that he has got his appointment. A few weeks hence, he and his belongings will be gone. Really it is a great opportunity. My master will thus be able to escape from an embarrassing situation before it is too late. The young lady has not been over-prudent during the last few days: she must suffer for her imprudence. Happily the price won't be very terrible. Not one man in a thousand knows her name. It is no shame to win a man's love; the shame comes later. Thank God, you have been spared that. The whole incident may now be satisfactorily terminated. You can both feel that it contains nothing but what does honour to the hearts of either."

Napoleon's sole response was a gratified smile bestowed upon the drawer where lay his mysterious papers. De Morin followed it, but hardly understood; and Majesty contented himself with a little digression upon the exalted nature of the office to which the Earl had been appointed.

"As Viceroy-designate he must receive the very highest attention from myself downwards. Therefore, my venerable friend—" he stopped abruptly: he recollected at that moment De Morin's suspicious dealings with the Eurasian.

Without a moment's reflection, heeding neither his promise to Carache, his obligations towards the Chamberlain, nor his own self-respect, he plucked at the portable bell hanging from his chair. The sound which summoned Godefroy must have taken its touch from Napoleon's fears: the valet came hurrying in. The old



gentleman, meanwhile, lay dozing peacefully in his arm-chair by the window. These domestic interruptions never interested him.

But Majesty's first word sufficed to wake him.

"Stand by me," he said to the domestic, very, very gravely, beckoning the latter to a position at his right hand. The Emperor's left was against the corner wall. The broad desk lay in front; while a waste-paper basket from Dindings guarded his legs.

Thus girt in, he turned upon the delinquent minister; a look of great severity covering his mobile countenance.

"Monsieur de Morin, I have to perform a very painful duty. So painful that I will go directly to the point. What has Nadez been doing down at Compiègne?"

The Count never faltered. "It's all that confounded Carache," he murmured to himself.

"Of course," he added out loud, "you desire a candid answer?"

"Of course."

"And you can spare the time for a tedious recital, which, moreover, ends in nothing?"

"I want the truth," the Emperor said tartly.

"I will give it you. But first, may I beg a chair for Monsieur Godefróy?"

"I prefer to stand," interposed the faithful fellow. He had already grasped his rôle in this little drama. He was the trusty body-guard. Any minute might see the need of flinging himself on that venerable old gentleman opposite, at present engaged in picking his teeth with his eyeglass-cord, and of bearing him away to the deepest dungeon Compiègne possessed.

"The whole thing is simple enough," began the Count. "The ministers are perfectly right; I have seen a deal of Nadez lately. Both he and Prince Felix were with me in the château here. But let me add this much, my first interview with the Eurasian was at Carache's own request."

"How am I to believe that?" cried Napoleon.

"Listen," said De Morin, at this point proceeding to examine his cord against the light with great interest; "you shall hear the whole story. One afternoon, about

a month ago, the Premier called upon me at the Élysée, and with a great show of mystery asked my help and counsel. He informed me that his creature, the Prefect, had put his finger upon the beginnings of a plot against your Majesty. He mentioned a number of names, Nadez among them. Now you must believe me when I tell you that, before that afternoon, I had never exchanged a single word with this Eurasian, nor so much as seen him—at least, not to my knowledge. I knew his name: who does not? Monsieur Godefroy will bear me out in saying that he has a world-wide notoriety?"

But Godefroy was not to be cajoled by such eager flattery. He stared straight in front of him, and kept his mind fixed upon the deepest dungeon.

"The conspiracy—and herein lay Carache's difficulty—was not against the Empire, but only against the Emperor. According to his myrmidons, it resolved itself into an Imperialist plot to dethrone your Majesty in favour of,"—and De Morin, "too full for sound," satisfied himself with shaping his silent lips into the name,— "in favour of ——. He and his brother and his sister, Carache felt convinced, were privy to the Eurasian's plans. They might not go all the way with Nadez; but they were bent on getting you out of France. The Prefect rather gathered that you were to be abducted across into Switzerland, under the pretence that you had fled before a *dossier* on its way from England to prove that you were an impostor."

"I like their insolence," shouted Napoleon.

"Ah, wait. These were merely vague suspicions. Carache did not pretend otherwise. And he desired my assistance to turn belief and mere conjecture into certainty. He flattered me on my position in Bonapartist circles."

"I see it all," cried Majesty. "Godefroy, you may leave us": a command which the interested butler considered uncalled for.

"I see it all. To oblige Carache—"

"Say rather, to oblige my master."

"To oblige me you consented to become—to become—"

"One of the Prefect's myrmidons; quite so," said De Morin drily. "Nadez wanted to enlist prominent Bonapartists. What Bonapartist more prominent than humble me?—that was the pretty way he put it. 'Hold yourself out to Nadez; and Nadez will jump. Take Felix as a sucking pig, if you think it advisable.' I did hold myself out to Nadez; I did take Felix as a sucking pig; and—as Carache had predicted—Nadez did jump."

"And his Highness?" Napoleon asked, thinking of Auteuil and the allegorical picture.

"The crocodile has kept him."

"But why does Carache now turn against you?"

"Simple enough. I have performed his mission only too well. I found that his factotum's suspicions concerning their Royal Highnesses were totally unfounded. Not a single Imperialist except myself—and the sucking pig—has even been approached."

"Thank God for that," ejaculated our hero.

"You may well say so. Nadez still hopes to give his intrigues that complexion. Indeed, I am commissioned to sound Prince ——," once more that silent pantomime with the lips, "but hitherto I have been too busy. But failing his Highness, I understand that Felix is to take your place."

"The little viper."

"We have forgotten Carache. Naturally, he felt annoyed to find that his built up theories were worthless. He wanted me to rectify the blunder—to simplify matters, if you please. Of course I refused. Then he demanded that I should wash my hands of the business; consider my mission at an end, so to speak. But Nadez has grown too fond of me: our friendship, I fear, will last till his ugly head tumbles into the basket. And if I have come to know more than Carache and his spies, am I not entitled to use my knowledge? The thing lies in a nutshell: the foxy fellow wants no one but himself to serve my Lord."

"How base of him."

"Carache is base. What can you expect? His father was a wholesale druggist."

"He shall hear what I think of him," bridled the other.

"I should n't. He does not mean any harm. If you adopt my advice, the next time he mentions me, just you say, 'Oh, the Count De Morin, *he's* all right.' That'll show him that we have had a chat about this business. He won't touch the topic any more."

"Is Nadez such a very diabolical person?" asked Napoleon.

"I have found him very gentle and pleasant. But he certainly is mischievous. He does n't like you at all. I think he means business this time."

"Curse him! Why, in God's name, cannot he stay and plot in his own country?"

"That would be to jeopardize the Viceroy of India," suggested the Chamberlain.

"He sha'n't jeopardize any one any further," cried the Emperor. "You shall see to it. You have my order to secure him and lodge him in gaol."

"How can I possibly execute it? I have no police under my command: the Prefect won't give me much help, you may rely on that."

"Telegraph my orders to Carache. Say that the whole gang are to be under lock and key by midnight."

"I obey," said De Morin; but he did not look convinced.

"At once," insisted his master; "these wild beasts shall not remain at large another day."

Napoleon met his guests that night with a light heart. His interview with De Morin had convinced him of his own sagacity and resolution. If he could grapple thus with a dangerous conspiracy, surely he might consider himself determined enough to wed the betrothed of his choosing. Carache, no less than Nadez, should taste of his iron will. Consequently this last of those Compiègne gatherings went better than its curious composition might have led one to expect.

To see, for instance, M. Prehlen with his arm on Lord Framlingham's shoulder, no one could have suspected that he meant to rob my Lord both of his satrapy and his daughter's only means of escape. De Morin and the Countess seemed inseparable; and the Emperor made

overtures to his prospective father-in-law which he prided himself were completely successful.

Their first meeting, truly, somewhat hung fire. While the guests were still awaiting their host and dinner, the Viceroy-designate had ensconced himself in a moody corner far from Prehlen, far from his wife and daughter. The Emperor singled him out on entering, and made straight towards his loneliness.

"Welcome, my Lord," he cried, getting tight hold of both the other's hands; "welcome to Compiègne. Were you not able to show so good a cause of absence, we should hardly forgive you your tardy arrival. As a near neighbour and friend, may I be allowed to congratulate you from the bottom of my heart?"

The viceregal head bent low between the viceregal hands still held by Majesty; but the thunder-clouds lingered.

Monsieur Prehlen appeared opportunely to help disperse them.

"Here comes his Excellency, bursting to add his own. Is it not so, Monsieur?"

"I have ventured to anticipate your Majesty. I have already proffered my felicitations to our dear friend."

"You must make the best of your chance," Napoleon rushed on, wishing to heaven that the Viceroy would smile. "We sha'n't have our dea—the Earl with us long."

"Alas, no."

"You two ought to be able to settle the Persian question."

"We have nearer and dearer matters than that to talk about," said the Norwegian with an affectionate look at Framlingham. What could the latter do but respond? Napoleon laughed as well.

The Earl had found his wife perfectly serene and sensible. She admitted willingly that there had been imprudence somewhere. She seemed overjoyed to get back home under his conduct. On his part he reflected that there was a good train to town about eleven next morning; also that a fortnight at most would see them clear of France forever. So he smiled a second time;



while his hands (still in the Imperial grasp) became a little less fishlike before they dropped away. It was peace.

All through dinner, and in the drawing-room afterwards, the Emperor did naught but propitiate this exalted Englishman, who responded at least with deference. Napoleon's positive reward came from another quarter. A smile, embarrassed indeed, and with a trace of pain, but unmistakably grateful, reached him whence he valued it most. Alas, it was the first token of recognition since—since yesterday. The last as well. His gaze kept seeking her face in vain. It frightened him to see how wan she looked, and wearied. Her grey eyes, clear and steady still, were wistful as he had never known them. His heart filled anew with overwhelming compassion. He longed to draw her into his protection. His protection! And he had made it that she was weary and wan, and looked forth upon the world with wistful eyes. No matter. The wedding should be very grand and make amends. India proved a fruitful topic. Napoleon could not leave it. It satisfied a very genuine impulse of his soul to speak about that mysterious East which had swallowed up so many of his friends.

Monsieur Prehlen handled it from the point of view of the cholera, and the Roof of the World. The English Ambassadors got her innings last.

"My dear Lord Framlingham," she said, a winsome smile corrugating her face, "I am going to ask a very great favour of you."

She did not notice that she had intercepted this much-worried satrap on his way across the drawing-room to his own daughter, with whom he had not exchanged a single word.

Whenever my Lord was not precisely overjoyed, he passed both hands through his hair. It served as a storm-cone among those who knew him. He did so now.

"Your Ladyship has only to name it."

"How good of you—how *really* good of you, *dear* Lord Framlingham. Threpps"—she called him Threpps behind his back—"always declares that you are one of



the most amiable of men. I cannot tell you how much I thank you."

"What may the service be?"—this very tartly.

"I want you and Lady Framlingham to be so very obliging as to ask my brother to Government House *sometimes*. He has been in India three years, you know; and *such* a piece of kindness from you would help him very much, *dear* Lord Framlingham."

"I shall be delighted to obey so sisterly an injunction. He is in the civil service?—the young fellow is lucky to be stationed at Calcutta."

"No, I am afraid he has nothing so good. Poor Douglas never worked very hard. Papa was always scolding him. He does very well, all things considered. He is a tea-planter in Cachar. They work him hard enough now, I can assure you. An occasional Saturday to Monday down at Calcutta will brighten the dear boy up *immensely*."

"The library in the Faubourg St. Honoré contains some capital books about India,—geographical, especially," the Earl replied with a faint smile and not too much gallantry. "Your Ladyship has noticed them?"

"Oh, dear yes," clasping her hands. "Geography has *always* been a favourite study of mine. At home in Surrey, more particularly in winter, when the days were short and the country *too* disagreeable for anything, I used to devour books. Papa and mamma were both most anxious that we girls should have a fair knowledge of the history and geography of our land. Threpps is quite surprised at my learning. Why, I run him close in his favourite study, modern French history. You will admit it is difficult. Threpps declares it's nothing but skeleton outline." "Hush—my dear young lady," remonstrated Framlingham. Pontécoulant had caught her last remark, and stood glaring.

"Well, he is right," she pouted. "I agree with him. I can beat him at it."

"And me too, no doubt; though it used to be my favourite subject also."

"No, no, no. That's one of your compliments. I am *sure* you are very clever; you silent men are *always*

clever. And—and—if you will forgive my saying so—one can always tell from a man's face."

"Your Ladyship flatters me."

"No, I do not. We women *can* judge character. Take his Majesty, for example. Well, really it needs no discernment to tell his. If I were to meet him in a London crowd, shabbily dressed and with all the marks of poverty about him, I could tell him at once for a *great* man. *Do* look at his square jaw, those steady lips, that massive forehead. *Can't* you read the iron will. *I* call him far, far greater than Napoleon I—the founder, you know, the great Emperor who took Sedan and defeated Bismarck and Don Carlos at Canossa; at least *I think* I am right," she added dubitatively.

"I understand whom you mean," said my Lord.

"Well, I call him greater than that one," she tranquilly resumed. "And as for Napoleon III (the one who was massacred at Ulundi, you know; massacred by the Mahdi, or the Negus, or some of those wretches, you know), well, one must not mention the two men in the same breath."

"And yet his present Majesty never did anything at the English bar. Report says that he came to France in despair of ever earning a livelihood there."

"Pooh—he had other things to occupy *him*."

"Aha, my Lord," cried Prehlen, bustling up to renew a conversation which had been broken off not ten minutes ago, "what a thousand pities you missed our charming excursion this afternoon. Her Ladyship has been telling you about it? No—well, I am within an ace of telling you myself. I refrain; do not look startled. But, in truth, the forest shows so beautiful of these winter days. I perspire poetry when I find myself among those God-given trees, a matting of twigs and moss to silence my feet, and here and there above me patches of the emerald dome."

"How beautiful," cried the Threppsess, "and how *true*. Monsieur Prehlen, you are a poet; I can read it in your face."

Monsieur Prehlen patted his chestnut beard.

"I write," he said deprecatingly.

Monsieur Pontécoulant came up at that moment, and my Lady transferred her attentions. His Excellency the Russian Ambassador seized the opportunity.

"My Lord Framlingham, a word with you."

The other groaned; he also cast a wistful glance at the corner where his wife and the Chamberlain sat gaily talking, with one other just behind them altogether silent.

"It is in connexion with what we were saying just now."

"The beauties of the forest."

Prehlen laughed. "What humour! What genuine humour! 'The beauties of the forest'—really you are too funny. You remind me of a favourite aunt of mine—dead now, poor creature," and he stopped and cudgelled his brain to remember whether he had told Lord Framlingham already of Ottilia's demise: he chanced it—"dead now; but in life full of dry humour. No, I refer to what we said about India. Why should n't we divide Afghanistan? It's a nasty, dirty place, and a nuisance to both of us. Geographically, it tempts partition. The Gool Mountains cut us beautifully in two. Guznee and Kandahar to you; Kabul and Herat to us. You keep the Shahzada."

"I am not authorized to listen to any such arrangement," replied the Earl, drawing himself up stiffly. "Were I so authorized, my answer to your proposition would be, 'Thank you for nothing.'"

"The Helmund for a barrier, you retaining Herat!" whispered Prehlen, winningly eager. "Come, the Helmund is fair enough."

"I can only assure you a second time that I am not authorized to open this matter," persisted the Englishman, making every outward sign of excessive distaste for the subject reconcilable with politeness. At home, such a manifestation would have sufficed to change half a dozen subjects. But Monseieur Prehlen shifted his course for no one.

"There, I think, you make your grand mistake," said he, fingering one of my Lord's buttons. "You English are all alike. 'Oh, we are not authorized to do that,'

'We have no instructions to talk about this,' you say; and your country suffers in consequence. Now, we Russians do n't wait for instructions. No one has given me any orders to partition Afghanistan. Indeed, the idea of partition never entered my head, until I saw you this evening. Then at once I said to myself, 'How can I turn his Excellency's presence to the best account?—Good, we will permanently solve the Asiatic frontier question on the basis of a partition of Afghanistan.' You observe, we are discussing the partition. To-morrow, we shall get half an hour over maps in your room; and with a few more meetings, we shall have agreed a draft division. I use the future tense, you perceive: your Excellency is going to be wise and concur. This agreement I at once post off to St. Petersburg without a syllable of introduction. 'Her Britannic Majesty's Viceroy-designate of India and myself,' I shall write, 'have decided to partition Afghanistan as a permanent solution to the Anglo-Russian frontier difficulties. You will please, therefore, occupy the northwestern half of that country to the River Helmund. Her Britannic Majesty retains the Shahzada.' My government will forward my instructions intact to the general commanding the Merv district, who will obey them."

Lord Framlingham could not keep back a smile. "Suppose my people are not equally complaisant? Take it they repudiate our little convention,—what then?"

"Oh, that's simple enough," Prehlen remarked modestly. "We get the lot."

"I thought as much. Alas, I fear I cannot accommodate you this time."

"You are wrong," warned Prehlen. "Our way is far the wisest. Do you suppose we should have pushed our legions to the ends of the earth if we had waited for orders? You never waited for orders when you were great—in your palm—I mean, in the days when you were building up your empire. But take time. I sha'n't regard anything as final to-night. Take time; and send me a post-card to the Embassy on Monday."

It's a long, long way from the Helmund to domestic matters. Framlingham, with his eyes from time to time

turned to where his wife and the Chamberlain sat chatting gaily, yearned to be allowed to span it.

The "inside" of De Morin's conversation was not quite so light-hearted as its appearance. He kept to undertones that were very necessary: Muriel sat just behind her mother.

"And your husband? Tell me everything."

"About what? I found him reading his letters in front of my fire. He kissed me very warmly—for him."

"Henriette, be serious. You do not suppose he is ignorant. Did he not reproach you for your imprudence?"

"Why in the world should he? Look at the child at this moment; by her mother's side, you see. And that has been her place during our whole stay. It is not our fault if people talk."

"You spoke very differently the other day."

"I was altogether wrong. Muriel gave me the most satisfactory explanation. She had fallen in with the Emperor by accident. The tears in his eyes were caused by excessive laughter: he had been telling her one of Godefroy's."

"My dear child, it's no use your trying those fibs with me."

Madame flushed, and fanned herself violently. But she did not speak.

"When do you leave Paris?" De Morin went on.

"I really cannot say."

"Soon, I fear. Heigho, seven years go slow. I shall be gone when you return."

"It may not be seven years," she replied, with a significance that did not miss fire.

"Seven is the usual number?"

"I do n't know. Please do not catechize me."

"Your husband naturally is overjoyed?"

"We have hardly spoken."

"He was here at six?"

"He went off at once to look for the children."

De Morin scraped his chin:

"Was he pleasant with Muriel?"

"How can I say? As a matter of fact I do not believe



he even found her. She and Nicholas got back much after the rest. Muriel, have you spoken with your father yet?"

"No, mother."

De Morin leaned forward to look at her. Her face, her voice, her attitude, told him everything. He glanced sharply from daughter to mother. The elder woman was smiling across at Nicholas.

"Ah, Henriette," he murmured, real pity in his voice, "if only you had left earlier."

"Walter, you know," she replied with great composure, "has left."

"I noticed. Why?"

"He volunteered to carry an urgent message for his father. He is a dear, amiable boy; always ready to do an act of kindness."

"Indeed?"

"Surely you have found that out,—you who know us all so well?"

"Naturally."

"Charles is just the same; only of course the dear boy is not so favourably situated as Walter. You see he has his way to make in the world."

"I understand perfectly."

"So he is a little over-anxious. I tell him he has no need. A young man of his appearance and abilities is sure to succeed. His aim is to become Prime Minister of England. I think he makes a mistake. He ought to enter French political life, where his sister would be able to assist him."

It was not possible that she could know all. In her eyes, surely, Muriel still had everything to give, and might name her price. And he leaned forward a second time to survey this poor young creature. Her face, but not her gaze, was lifted and slightly flushed. Her parted lips were striving to murmur a welcome that remained obstinately voiceless. He turned; her father was approaching. De Morin rose and moved away.

The girl looked timidly up. She saw alone the edge of my Lord's beard moving with gentle words. She faltered on the brink of tears.



"Where has my little girl been hiding? I have done nothing but search for her the whole evening."

"Have you, father?" she murmured.

He seated himself beside her, and, altogether careless of the assembled company, took her lifeless fingers between his own. The change of position had its advantages. Her averted gaze was no longer so conspicuous; although with her hand within his loving grasp she felt again that fearful need of tears.

"I have great news," continued my lord. "I want this wise little brain to advise me on a number of matters,"—he passed a hand lightly over the drooping head. Napoleon noticed. As for my Lady, who hemmed Muriel in on the other side, she began to shuffle her feet and her beautiful shoulders. There were some demonstrations which even she could not endure.

"You and I, my little one, have often talked about India. We are going there at last."

## Chapter X

Muriel moved the shadow of an inch nearer her mother.

"Your mother and I find that we can leave Paris by to-morrow week. What does my little girl say? Remember, we shall get over a month in London. She can do all her shopping there. I hope she means to accommodate her fond old father."

"Does mother really say that we can leave Paris next week?"

My lady began to fan herself violently. "I meant provided nothing unexpected happened," she cried, looking askance at her husband.

"What unexpected event could happen?" he snarled, frowning down at the circle of floor just in front of the Countess's feet. "The Paris shops won't help you. It will hardly need five days to shut up the house. I mean to try and let it."

"It is my house," Madame retorted. "You have no right to do anything of the kind." But the Earl was not to be drawn into this time-worn quarrel. He shrugged his shoulders, then turned once more to Muriel with softened eyes. She had fallen back into her former apathy. Explanations, she felt, were, for the moment, quite impossible. Her poor, dear, kind old father must be suffered to go on building his castles. She felt no great desire to shatter them before it became absolutely necessary. Indeed, of all the terrors passing through her brain, this was the most strongly defined and the most persistent,—the burning wish that no frightful barrier kept her from laying her head upon her father's breast.

"Mr. Rodenham gave me a little present for you.

He had a lot of photographs of Calcutta,—it seems that he went out there to deliver a course of lectures when he was a young man,—and he thought you might like a little glimpse beforehand of your future home. They are ancient, certainly; twenty-five years old, I think he said. But many of them are still fairly faithful; and he hopes you won't value them any the less for their age."

"It is very kind of him."

"I told him you would feel flattered. I say, Muriel," and he bent forward in an attitude of playful mystery, "I know some one who, if he were only thirty years younger, would be wanting to deprive me of my little girl. He never sees me but he asks after you."

Muriel shuddered. Mr. Rodenham,—the English Premier's face and figure rose vividly before her, pressing themselves into ruthless comparison with that other, her betrothed and her betrayer. Mr. Rodenham,—the shabby, shuffling man, with rugged features and eager eyes; the man who cared naught for pomp or parade of power, who went to court in a second-hand Windsor uniform, used in a Savoy opera and bought at the theatrical costumier. *He* had risen to the top by sheer grit, not by chance. *He* had never dreamt of the great things he meant to do.

"Here's another point for my little counsellor. That second brother of yours has suddenly made up his mind that he does not want to go into the diplomatic service. He means to give us the benefit of his companionship upon our journey. He evidently expects me to take him as my secretary. I am resolved, however, to let Walter have the refusal. He needs the experience every bit as much as Charles; and you know how indolent he is. Now, do you think I ought to make him come, even if he does not want to? Or, would the place be of more value to Charles, in any case? I want to do the best by both of them; but they are difficult young cubs to manage. Come, little woman."

"I am afraid the boys would hardly like me to interfere."

"Nonsense. They sha'n't know. Have I not a right to consult whom I choose? If either of them would deign

to talk sense, I should be glad to listen. Both of them, however, are quite incompetent; especially Charles."

She smiled faintly. "He would not like to hear you say so."

"I daresay not. One would credit a man of his age with more sense than to be everlastingly talking about himself. He made me very angry, last night."

"Did he, father?"

"Bah, do not let us trouble more about him," said my Lord a trifle inconsistently. "Who is to be—Walter or the other one?"

"I really cannot say."

"We will ponder it over, and give 'em our decision by and by."

"One more point," resumed the Earl presently, and with a sudden change to grave significance which could leave no doubt that this was his alpha and omega on a distasteful subject, impossible to disregard altogether, "and then we can get to tigers and elephants and Eastern palaces. How soon will you be ready to start for Paris, to-morrow?"

"I can be ready very early," she murmured.

"Good, that is settled." Henriette, you will please tell your maid that we leave by the quarter past nine. Ha, his Majesty has withdrawn. Come Henriette. Come dearest"; and then, under his breath, "thank God, the end of these miserable evenings."

With Muriel's arm tight within his own, he led the way to Madame's room. Madame herself followed behind. Her savage looks, lavished indiscriminately on both relatives, showed how she resented this slight to her dignity. At the door the girl drew back, murmuring a low good-night. She longed to escape the infliction of further tenderness. "Good-night?—why, child, it is not yet ten. You are going to stay and talk to me a little. I have many things to say, which I could not even whisper in that miserable drawing-room."

She had to obey; but her reluctance increased ten-fold when she discovered that her mother had already slipped through into the inner room, the bedroom of the suite. The communicating door stood ajar, and

Muriel caught an occasional sight of their maid bending over boxes. But even this poor companionship was presently denied her. An unseen hand softly swung it to; the next minute she could hear Madame scolding Marie. She understood at once. Lord Framlingham pressed her into an easy-chair which stood upon one side of the fire. He himself sank gratefully into its opposite companion. Father and daughter were face to face.

"This is delightful," he said, and he sighed contentment. The room, with its exquisite tapestry, and the generous fire that filled the open grate, looked bright indeed. A lamp directly behind Muriel's chair enveloped her in a blaze of light. He had not placed her there designedly. God knows, there lay no purpose in his heart to probe her with questions and watch her face. Not she herself shrank more genuinely from all further mention of this terrible business (it was terrible to him, little as he knew). She herself could not yearn more eagerly to have it altogether forgotten. And they were forgetting it. That is why he looked across at her with such benevolence, sighing contentment.

She muttered that the heat of the fire was unendurable, and moved to another chair.

"Your young bones take less to warm them. All you children are icy mortals. I wonder whom you get it from; I love a roaring fire. That's the one thing which made me hesitate about India. Old Rod — Mr. Rodenham has got hold of the idea that the Viceroy ought to spend more of his time down at Calcutta. He complains that the authorities are too fond of Simla. It makes our less fortunate countrymen jealous; many of them in that way acquire a distaste for their own districts. It is one of his fads. The Viceroy, in his view, should endure the same rigours as every one else. Certainly, he does not spare himself, when you come to think that he has never occupied Downing Street, but clings to that beastly Edmondton as though he loved it. I told him I was quite willing. Only one *can* get fires in Simla," he laughed. "The thing is amusing, is it not?"

She did not so much as smile. She knew that, before they parted this evening, she would have to tell her father everything. On his side, he never doubted that his persistent good humor would at last bear fruit.

"Finally we agreed that I was to have two months out of the twelve. I have to make a tour through Burmah in March, so I shall save this month's allowance. In that way we shall get four months next year; won't that be pleasant?"

"Very pleasant."

"Another thing Rodenham told me amused me very much. We were talking about a native mission school up in the Northwest, which has been giving Rochberie a deal of trouble. The point lies in a nutshell. Two years ago the board appointed a new head master, a Manchester man, who appears to be a person with some ideas. Last Easter he issued a circular saying that there were too many excellent religions in the Empire for him to take upon himself to choose for the boys. Therefore, each pupil would be allowed to go, from the age of entering the school to eighteen, without religious instruction. The board is in hysterics. The Secretary of State, *more suo*, is generous enough to leave the matter entirely to me. Rodenham won't help me. All he did was to say that it reminded him of a former high court judge, who managed the bankruptcy work. This legal luminary had the same plan as the man from Manchester. When his eldest son reached maturity, and the serious question was put to him, the lad replied, 'If you please, father'—Rodenham insists that he said 'My Lord'—'if you please, I should like to be the same religion as the Official Receiver.' It is a funny story; don't you think so?" She did n't; but she smiled wearily. Any one who loved her less dearly *must* have seen. Lady Framlingham bounced in, muttering; seized her writing materials, which littered the table, and bounced out again. Her husband waited till she was gone, then he delivered his last attack.

"You and I, little one, will assuredly keep a diary. You take charge of the scenery and the social events and the amusing things, while I can manage the dry



parts, politics and statistics, you know. If we do it well, we shall easily find a publisher. And the proceeds shall go to the Sidmouth Infirmary. Won't that be delightful?"

Her sole reply was a sob, which she could not stifle. The bedroom door had not been shut after the last irruption: it widened ever so slightly.

"Father, . . . I have something terrible to tell you."

"My darling child," stretching forward to take her, "you must n't distress yourself like that. I know all that you can tell me; and I mean to forget it. You must forget it also."

She passed from sobs into hysterical weeping. She buried her poor face in her bent arm, all the while shaking a passionate negative to what he said.

He leaned over her, with one arm round her huddled shoulders. "My darling Muriel, please don't cry, my darling. You don't think I blame you, do you? You are only a child. It was a shame to bring you here," and my Lord glowered at the softly moving door.

She quieted a little under his gentle words.

"But I have come back to look after my little one. She and I mean to put an end to all this silly chatter about a union between her and a certain nameless personage."

She lifted her tear-stained face. He would not suffer her.

"Tut, tut, you are not going to be a little goose any longer. Naturally that nameless personage vows he loves us, and all that sort of nonsense. Possibly he does; but we don't love him, and there's an end of the business. Only this, if he does love you as much as no doubt he avers, he would have been more careful of your reputation. No, no, dearest, I am not blaming you; don't begin again, I beseech you, my darling."

"Oh, father," she whispered, "he does love me; he has told me so a hundred times."

"Then he is a greater coward than I thought. Well, let him love you, if he chooses. It cannot hurt you—at a distance. But he sha'n't marry you. For one thing, I can't spare my little girl. And Muriel," he went on,

leaving that playful manner which would keep bursting through the clouds, "you do not know what a narrow escape you have had." He could feel how she trembled: the moment was propitious, much as he hated the topic. He waxed even more impressive.

"Love, I do not doubt, came easily enough to his tongue. These adventures are every-day concerns with men of his high rank. He is unmarried: no one will think the worse of him, how many lives may strew the path of his desires. But, my darling daughter, you do not need that I should speak about the victims. I would rather see my little one in her grave than spared to such a fate. Yes, a thousand times; even though I had to kill her."

Small wonder she shivered.

He felt a rough hand upon his shoulder.

"For goodness sake, be quiet," cried Madame; "you will send the poor child into a fit."

He did not condescend to notice this interruption. He drew his daughter closer to him and enfolded her within a passionate embrace. Then he rose and, taking his stand in front of the fire, still gazed benignly down at this poor little shipwrecked form.

"So much for that," said he, blowing it away; "peace be to its ashes. None of us have been entirely blameless; so, like wise folk, we will forthwith and evermore forget it. Look up, my daughter; let me see you smile"; but Muriel could not. She had missed the chance of making her confession, and she still sat a heap of huddled misery.

Madame entered the lists. She took her stand directly behind her daughter's chair—touching sight! signifying, as it did, a wealth of maternal protection.

"I presume you mean that Muriel is to banish all thought of his Majesty from her mind."

"Certainly I do."

"Then let me tell you that you are doing them both a very serious wrong."

"Pish, Henriette, do not be a fool."

"How dare you speak to me like that?" she retorted savagely. "I repeat, if you come blundering in between

Muriel and his Majesty, you will do the young couple an irreparable injury."

"I daresay his Majesty will survive it," said he, mimicking her ceremony.

"You boor!"

Husband and wife stood glaring. It looked as though the unspoken hatred of many years was about to burst at last.

"Muriel and I understand one another," he cried, now at white heat. "We do not ask for your interference; you have already done enough harm."

Madame clenched her delicate hands: her face went from white to purple.

"I shall not bandy rudenesses with you, my Lord. If you force Muriel to India against her will—"

"Against her will? Why, Muriel, you are only too glad to come?"

"Oh, father, I am not able; I am not able."

"What does this folly mean?"

"Muriel, may I tell your father?"

The sole answer was a groan which could have but one meaning. It even told my Lady a little more than she already knew. But she had a brave heart, had my lady; she did not falter.

"The Emperor has offered her his hand. Our dear daughter has accepted."

"You fools! you fools!" almost shrieked her husband, "have you neither of you more sense? Cannot you see that such a marriage would be impossible?"

"Why should it be impossible? Muriel is as well born as the late Empress?"

"My poor child," once again bending tenderly over his daughter, "the mischief has gone deeper than I suspected. Do you really imagine he means all this foolishness?"

"Yes, father, I am sure of it," very eagerly.

"And do you love him?"

"Yes, father," but with rather less decision.

"And it will be a terrible wrench to be parted from him?"

She did not answer; but her heart was beating with

hope refreshed. Alas, it was refreshed to a bitter disappointment.

"Make up your mind to this, my daughter, he can never marry you. You are not quite an idiot," this last with an angry look to his wife,—“so I won't stop to explain why. And you, my darling, will accept my word. We won't give way to any more silly fancies, will we? We are going to be brave, and worthy of the fond old father who is so proud of us?”

She could endure no more. “Oh, father, forgive me,” she cried in a burst of hysterical passion. “I would come with you, indeed I would; but—but, it is too late!”

He looked down at her vacantly. “Too late?—too late? What do you mean?”

“Mother, cannot you help me?” But the Countess remained resolutely silent.

There was no further need for words. The scales had fallen from his eyes at last.

“You have allowed yourself to be deceived by his lying promises? You have surrendered your honour into his hands?” he asked at length with a deliberation that seemed even more frightful than the foregoing silence.

She did not answer.

“And you really suppose that he will marry you?”

“He has sworn. Father, dear father, don't despise me. He has sworn.”

“You poor deluded creature, you have given him all he ever wanted. His promise will never get another thought. Were he the most honourable man in all the world,—which he is not,—did he *still* love you as much as he averred before this crime of yours,—which is impossible,—yet he could never marry you. Take this as certain; my experience may be your guide.”

“Experience!” sneered Madame. “Your precious experience did not prevent you from being turned out of the embassy. I might have known that you would have come blundering in just at the critical moment. If only Muriel and I could be left alone,” and Madame flung up her arms, mingling a gesture of defiance and despair, “all would yet be well. Napoleon loves her madly.

This evening he could not take his eyes from off her face. She is not the first who has given her future husband this mark of her love and confidence. Why should n't the marriage take place? All the ministers are in favour of it; his Majesty has said so himself. Of course if you come shrieking out your miserably foolish tirades, waking up the whole Palace, Napoleon will be disgusted, and might be tempted to back out."

"It is my own fault," said the Earl, softening his voice and leaving Madame to simmer; "I ought to have come directly I got word that you had gone to Compiègne against my express wishes. I did wrong to leave you amid so much temptation with no better guard than this shallow-hearted woman. But she is your mother; I *did* imagine that your chasti—that your honour would be safe in her keeping. I never questioned it; and—and—oh! Muriel, I believed in you. No, no, we are to blame; we, your wretched parents; not you, my foolish little one. We are to blame, and it is for us to repair the mischief as best we can."

Both women brightened. My Lord consulted his watch.

"Eleven," he muttered, "we have ample time. Call your maid."

The servant appeared: she had only that minute risen from strapping the last box. My Lord despatched her to fetch my Lady Muriel's travelling clothes—her boots, and the garments she came in, and her hat and ulster. The maid had orders likewise to return with one of the Palace servants.

She returned with no less a person than Godefroy himself. Both Muriel and her mother thought at first that he had brought comforting assurances from the enemy. His first words undeceived them.

"This young lady tells me that your Excellency wants me."

"You are one of the porters?"

"I am a domestic."

"Is the Chamberlain still up?"

"Monsieur, I cannot say."

"Can we have a carriage to convey us at once to the station?"



"Walter, you are surely never going to behave so foolishly?"

"Leave me to manage this matter in my own way. Can we have a carriage, I ask? Are you deaf?"

The old man gazed compassionately at the bent head.

"My Lord can have a carriage. But there are no trains until the morning."

"Oh, yes, there are," muttered the Englishman. "The Maubeuge train stops here to-night." Godefroy shrugged his shoulders. "I forgot. Mademoiselle hardly seems to me in a condition to travel."

Framlingham turned upon him like a tiger. "What is that to you? Let me know when the carriage is here. Now, Muriel, go into your mother's room and change your things. You, too, Henriette, if you please."

Neither moved. His wife suddenly became sweetly reasonable.

"Walter, are you carefully considering what you are about to do. I agree cordially that we should assume a dignified attitude. The sooner we leave in the morning, the better. But this midnight flitting will occasion a terrible scandal, which may cloud the whole of the poor child's married life. It might prevent the marriage altogether."

"There can be no marriage," her husband rejoined curtly. "Come, Muriel, do as I order you. I have neither time nor the mood for further words. Stir yourself, child," he cried with growing irritation, "stir yourself. You do not want to aggravate matters by foolish disobedience."

"But, father, you are helping him to disgrace me."

"Dearest, be sure of this, if any other way were possible, I would follow it. None is. He has seduced you, simply because he knows as much. He asks nothing better than that you should suffer him to keep you beside him. He will tell any lies to achieve that purpose, promising you marriage a dozen times a day. It might be years before he tired of you; but you are no nearer marriage now than you will be when that terrible time comes, and he informs you that he has no further use for your services. It goes to my heart to have to draw



such a hideous picture. Only you must face the inevitable result to any weakness at this moment."

The maid put her head in at the door. She was British, and angular, and ancient. She had come to Madame among her husband's wedding presents. My Lady called her "Marie," and swallowed her that way.

"Lady Muriel's travelling clothes are ready," she said.

The girl shrank back from her father's outstretched hands.

"You are making a great mistake," cried Lady Framlingham. If Muriel takes my advice, she won't obey you."

"Silence," thundered the Earl, enraged by his daughter's obstinacy. "The girl has obeyed you up till now, and nicely she has done for herself. Muriel, do you hear me? Go at once with Marie. This place stifles me."

She looked at him with reproachful eyes. Her face, grown terribly weary in a single day, and framed in a maze of disordered hair, printed itself upon his memory, never to fade therefrom while life endured. This henceforth was the vision evoked by mention of the much-loved name. Not the fresh, genial child upon his knee; not the lanky schoolgirl, full of mischief and free as air; not the graceful maiden, highborn, and clad in ice-bound innocence; but this sin-stained woman, whose weary face lay framed in a maze of disordered hair—his little Muriel.

"Do not separate us. I will come with you, father; only do not separate us. Do not take me away to India, I implore you! He is a man, and he loves me—he loves me, I tell you. I have good reason to know it. And—and I owe it to myself; you owe it to me not to take me away at that moment when a great career opens itself before me."

"Ah, yes," he exclaimed bitterly, "I might have guessed the weapon."

Marie's head reappeared. "The hot water which I have poured out," she remarked in unexpected French, "is getting cold."

Godefroy entered the other door at the selfsame instant. "The carriage," said he in equally unexpected English, "is at the front entrance."

"Promise me you will not separate us?"

"I make no promises," he cried. "I must have implicit obedience. If you are content to risk a life of disgrace, thank God I am wise enough to save you."

"I will not go to India." The increasing harshness of his manner drove her to it.

"How dare you speak like that?" Madame was drawing closer to their daughter; he turned upon her with clenched fists.

"Henriette, go and dress yourself," he shouted.

"I shall stay with my dau—"

"Go and dress yourself." He was rising into a paroxysm of fury. A single key higher, and the whole Palace would hear. He seemed to want them to.

"Go and dress yourself," he yelled yet again.

Both servants had witnessed this extraordinary outburst. Marie, her face in absolutely adamant repose, walked up to her mistress and drew her away into the next room.

"You, too, Muriel. Do you hear me?"

"I am not a slave to be ordered about in this manner."

"So this is your return for my indulgence. Let me tell you, my Lady, not many fathers would forgive their children such a sin as yours."

She rose and faced him. She could meet his eye now.

"You shall not insult me. I see what you want; you want always to keep me under, to trample on me. In secret you are overjoyed that this has happened. You think that an empress is greater than a viceroy; and you want always to keep me under."

"Muriel, you are mad. And you know how much I love you!"

"If you love me, you will not come between me and my—husband."

"Faugh, you make me sick. Marie, my coat and hat."

"Did I not say as much. You parade your love; but

your real aim is to trample on me and keep me under. And for this I am to be kept a poor, ruined creature all my life."

"Enough of this. I give you your choice. Come with me to India, forget this wretched seduc—lover of yours; and you shall find your home just as tender, just as loving as it has ever been. Refuse, and I swear to you—empress or no empress—I will never see you again. See—I speak quite calmly. I am fully conscious of what I am saying. You must obey me, or you must go your way."

"I will not give him up."

"You elect to become his mis—, Muriel," he broke off in one last burst of tenderness, "be warned while there is yet time. To-morrow will be too late. Do not let me go like this. I have never used compulsion towards any of my children; I am not going to begin now. I might compel you; perhaps it would be better if I did compel you. But I do not. Muriel, reflect what you are doing. Again and again I tell you, I understand these things better than you. For the thousandth time take my assurance, he can never marry you. You know it. You are not of the sort to live in a fool's paradise,"—and bethinking him of her sagacity, whereof in days gone by he had been so proud, he gulped down a sob,—“in your heart of hearts, you know you can never be his empress. Be guided by your own good sense,—my little Muriel, my darling, you who are so precious to me."

"Mademoiselle will be wise and accompany her kind father," interjected Godefroy.

My Lord did not rend him now. "This is the Emperor's servant. You hear what he says? You may be sure *he* knows his master."

"Here is your mother," he went on, "and Marie too," who was attired in a close-fitting ulster and helmet-shaped blue hat, which gave her the appearance of a British constable: "we await you only."

"I cannot do as you bid me."

"Is that your final answer?"

"Yes."

"And you choose to remain alone and without protection in this man's house?"

"If you are coward enough to leave me. I shall know how to protect myself."

"You have been so successful hitherto."

Madame flung her arms round the girl's neck.

"I will not leave my child," she cried. "Walter, it is you who are mad. It is inconceivable that you would do such a thing. The whole world will cry shame."

"Let them. I have done more than most fathers would do. Muriel, I am still ready to forgive you and to take you home."

"Do as he asks," says my Lady, loud enough to be heard all over the room. Time to discuss India when we get home. You cannot possibly stay here."

The girl seemed inclined to fall in with this Punic proposal.

"I must have your word of honour that you will relinquish him forever," insisted her father.

"I cannot do that."

"Then we must part forever." He was cool enough to be able to give Godefroy directions about their luggage:

"Come, Henriette."

"I refuse."

"Very well"; and my Lord moved towards the bell.

"What is the madman about to do?" she cried.

"He is going to summon as many as care to come. He is going to send for Lord Threpps and the Prehlens, and Marshal Brisson, and Nicholas Fersen, aye, and every lackey about the place, to let them know how the Emperor has robbed him of his daughter; how this mighty potentate has decoyed a child into his house to ruin and debauch her! That is what the madman is going to do."

"You are so valuable," he went on, eyeing her grimly, "I have a mind to call them, whether you come or not. I *will* call—no, it shall be my revenge. Henriette, are you coming?"

"Mother, I beseech you, spare me that last scene. All will be well in the end, if only you both go quietly."

"I am coming. Kiss me, Muriel," straining the girl

to her bosom. "Ah, my darling child, you know I never meant you to come to harm. How I wish we had never seen this miserable place; that these dreadful things had never happened. But it will all come right in the end. He can never be such a coward. I feel certain that it will all come right." But despite these comforting assurances her remorse almost choked her. It was a dreadful price to pay, simply because she had been very, very foolish and very, very weak. If only she had taken De Morin's advice. Ah, those "if onlys,"—how they strew the world! "Your father will forgive you," were her parting words.

"Not until I am Empress," said the girl, a last gleam of pride lifting that poor draggled head.

Marie prepared to follow her master and mistress. But she had one word to add before she went.

"I think the three of you are behaving very foolishly," she said with composure. "I do indeed. What your father can be thinking about beats me altogether. He is in one of his nasty tempers. Say the word, my Lady, and I stay with you"; and Marie, who had a passion for crown-stamped buttons of the soup-plate pattern, clasped number one below her throat. "We can be out of this and off by six. Your father will be glad enough to forget his part in to-night's work. He has no reason to be proud of it, I can tell him."

"Dear Marie, it will be no use," sobbed the girl. "You do n't know father."

"I knew him before you were born."

"It will be no use," Muriel repeated. And Marie turned upon her heels and disappeared. You can't wear crown-stamped buttons without acquiring some amount of military precision.

Muriel buried her face in her hands, and gave herself over to misery. It took complete possession of her being. She could think of nothing. She knew that, having erred, she owed herself this reparation, pursued at such a cost. Her heart had room alone for a confused remembrance of the terrors of the last thirty hours.

The touch of gentle fingers hovering for a moment above her head startled her back into life. A great joy



filled her heart: her rightful protector had come at last. But it was the voice of Godefroy.

"My young mistress has shown herself full of courage. Does she desire that I should help her?"

She answered with a look of gratitude.

"Remember, I promise nothing. I still think that you would be wiser to obey your father. We have yet time—shall we follow him?"

"I cannot."

They were all alike. Not one but counselled her to sit down under disgrace. She would have to fight her battle out alone, relying on nothing but Napoleon's honour and her own strong will.

"To-morrow morning, then," urged Godefroy. "I will this moment rouse Lady Threpps: she shall accompany Mademoiselle to Paris by the first train."

"No, no."

"Then I have a third plan. Mademoiselle is prepared to risk all on a single throw?"

She nodded.

"Wait here. I will return directly."

It is a trite saying that hope in youthful breasts takes a deal of killing. The kind old man had doubtless hurried off to fetch Napoleon. Her lover would learn how faithful she had been to him, and her terrible plight. The result went without saying. She had no fear. To-morrow would be her wedding-day. Not the grand ceremony originally pictured; but none the less sweet for that. She began to colour in the scene: the guests departed; the chapel dimly lit, and empty except for Napoleon and herself, the priest, his faithful valet, and perhaps De Morin. Yes, she would always love Compiègne, both for what she had suffered, and for this crowning joy. And on Monday she would drive in a one-horse brougham and quiet clothes round to her father's house. She would go straight to his study. Marc-Antonin should throw wide the door and announce, "Her Majesty, the Empress."

Voices broke in upon these delicious dreams. How to meet him? Not in a posture of despair, surely; nor yet too gaily. She rose with beating heart.



Godefroy came first, his ponderous face marked by lines of deepened gravity. And his companion proved only Brisson! with whom she had not exchanged a single word since their only interview; the man whom she had always passed with averted gaze and quickened pulse.

But his chivalrous bearing soon reassured her. He bent his head over her hand much as though she had been Empress-dowager of China, and not the unhappy thing foretold by his fatal words. The worthy soldier had evidently come straight out of dreamland: a long military overcoat swathed him from chin to ankle. It served him as a dressing-gown.

"His Majesty is up, you say?" he inquired of Godefroy.

"He is still at his desk."

"And he knows about—about Mademoiselle?"

"I have just told him."

"Then he expects her?"

Godefroy gave no direct affirmative. He muttered merely that there could be no impediment to their proceeding thither forthwith.

"Mademoiselle comprehends the risk," suggested the gentle-hearted soldier. "This—this midnight attack—visit may only serve to irritate his Majesty. Men are so different. On second thoughts you prefer to speak with him in the morning? Godefroy and I will arrange it."

"I will go at once," she answered; "I have no fear."

"We obey. Godefroy, go first. Mademoiselle." She took his proffered arm with a heart not quite so fearless as her words. But she knew her stronger will.

And truly her dreads were nothing to Napoleon's. Returning to his room some two hours earlier, he had found a telegram from Carache to De Morin (annotated in red ink by the Chamberlain) declaring it impossible to arrest Nadez, either that night or for many nights to come. Indignant at such flagrant disobedience, the Emperor had then and there sat down to administer a stinging rebuke to his Premier. He had just sealed the envelope when Godefroy made his unwelcome appearance. Napoleon had ventured to suggest that the interview should be postponed until the morning. "I came to see

whether his Majesty was up and able to receive her," the valet had answered curtly; "I will conduct her to him."

So Majesty, not daring to say him nay, now sat in anticipation of a terrible scene. For the moment, Muriel figured in his unstable mind as the chief offender. Men and women always meet half-way to work the evil which they two had done; what right then had she to cause this miserable midnight scandal, or force herself into his presence, like some common slut who flaunts a successful affiliation summons and the baby one yard behind the beaten, draggled-tailed defendant?

Godefroy and Brisson led the way. The sight of a second witness increased the poor fellow's indignation. He stood up, lamely attempting to look self-possessed. And so he remained, waiting for the proceedings to begin.

Muriel had imagined that one step across the threshold would carry her into her lover's arms. She entered smiling. Piteously indeed, but nevertheless smiling. She even attempted a display of those fascinations—those winning, childlike airs and graces—which had never hitherto failed of success. She could have chosen no more fatal demeanour. Napoleon felt repulsed and sickened. It was the first touch of genuine hatred; taste number two of the end.

Her companions stopped half-way across the room. She advanced alone,—still smiling, gazing at him fondly with that whimsical expression, which, in his opinion, she no longer had any right to wear. How base and unmanly was this creature's heart, how altogether devoid of chivalry, was now shown beyond question. He actually receded, visibly repelled, before this poor creature whom he had betrayed.

She stopped. Her chin dropt in bewilderment; a wave of scarlet swept across her face. Despite her resolute heart and the feet that had strayed, she remained a child still. And the truth came faintly; the invincible corollary of their love. She caught her breath and burst into tears. Her distress went straight to its target; the heart of this man of a thousand changing moods at last was touched. So he opened his arms.

"My darling," he cried, "don't weep like that, unless you want to unman me. Godefroy has told me what you have done for my sake. How I love you for it, dearest; more than ever before, if such a thing were only possible."

She grew calm at once. It was good to nestle thus against his breast, now that she had no other protector.

"My precious is tired and overwrought," he went on. "She did quite right to come to me. I could never have rested without telling her how wise she was to trust in my great love." He began to shower kisses upon her head. No doubt they fell where her father's had fallen, half an hour before. "But we must all have a good night's rest. You would not like to make a confidante of Lady Threpps?" he asked anxiously by way of afterthought; "she could take you home by an early train."

"I will not return home until I am married."

"But your poor father?"

"I do n't see that he need be especially considered," Godefroy broke in bluntly. "He has n't behaved *himself* over-well. Not that I do n't recommend Mademoiselle to return home—unless, of course, your Majesty intends to fulfil your promise."

"Of course I do," responded Majesty faintly. But she looked at him with such beseeching doubt clearly expressed in her eyes that he resumed his former ardour and his high-flown words.

"Listen, Muriel. In the presence of Marshal Brisson and Monsieur Godefroy I swear to you that I will keep my promise. Do you hear me, Brisson? Godefroy, do you? I will forfeit my throne; I will forfeit life itself rather than surrender you. Before the great God I swear it."

Anything further would have been bathos. Napoleon kissed her brow (a rapt expression, speaking of heaven and the love that lives among the angels, over his own); and Muriel returned the kiss, suffering herself to be turned aside from more specific details.

But, all the same, she kept wondering why she had fallen. Was this really it, that, being conscious of his unstable character, she had imagined a sacrifice of her honour would draw him closer to her? Pure-minded even

yet, and still without passion, she had bent before a weaker will; she had given herself up to a man who himself was near as modest, not practised in seduction, not a libertine, falling for the first time also, and only because he had loved her very much.

"The best course," resumed the Emperor with growing complaisancy, "would be to find you a suitable home and a suitable companion until the necessary preliminaries are got through. They will take about a fortnight."

"So long? But my father and mother leave Paris in ten days."

"Ah, they shall be induced to postpone their departure. Never fear, little one. I have it," he cried, struck by a brilliant idea; "what do you say to Meaux? Marshal Brisson shall take you there in the morning. I—I, the Emperor, will go in person to your father, and give him my pro—satisfactory assurances. He and my Lady will proceed to Meaux to-morrow evening; and you will only have to walk across our little bridge. Ah, Muriel, the summer is coming back: we shall have many a sweet hour yet, beside our little bridge."

"How good and kind you are," she cried, genuinely grateful.

"That's settled. Now, little one,"—she did not resent this repeated use of her father's term of endearment,—"*to bed. Dry your eyes. That weary little heart must get to rest.*"

A fresh fancy seized him. He glanced anxiously at Brisson and Godefroy: would they laugh? he wondered. Why should they? The former had received his title in identically the same way.

"Godefroy," he burst forth, "you will conduct the Princess to her room."

The valet bowed, and turned to Muriel:

"Your Highness will kindly follow me?"

The girl looked from one to the other with a bewildered laugh of pleasure. She kissed her hand to Napoleon amid smiles that no longer repelled. Then she turned and followed the major-domo. "If only father could see me!" she thought, as she went along the silent corridors.

If only she could have seen her father. The Maubeuge express was slackening speed for the first time since quitting Compiègne. Lady Framlingham, seated by the near window of the compartment which she and her husband divided between them, passed her muff across the glass. A flickering lamp without showed the first black signs of Paris. She turned timidly round to my Lord, who leaned back in the farther corner, frowning at the hat-rack in front of him. He had not changed his posture throughout the journey, nor uttered a word.

"We are there," she murmured. He made no sign; and she resumed her survey of the outside world, idly watching how the rails began to multiply and glisten under the increasing lights.

Marie was at their door almost before the train had come to a standstill. She helped her mistress onto the deserted platform, and both women stood waiting for my Lord. But my Lord came not. Henriette turned: my Lord had not budged, only his head had fallen forward.

"Walter!" she cried; and she sprang towards him and laid it for a moment against her breast. They had each to take one side of him, and help him down and from the station. And so he goes out of this story to rule his millions, robbed of what he loves most in the world, and blinded with tears.

## Chapter XI

Morning brought but sombre awakening to all concerned in last night's tragedy. Muriel left for Meaux at an early hour. The journey, following as it did upon a tender parting, was made under Brisson's guidance. His gentle tact helped to soften it, no less than the girl's confidence in the success of her lover's mission.

If only this chapter—and the opportunities are growing very precious—might proceed to chronicle a day spent in absolute fulfillment of our hero's solemn vows, how gladly would a not over-ready pen accompany him to the Avenue de Villiers, No. 47, and describe with painful minuteness his suppliant attitude upon the doorstep, his chilling reception, the father's ebbing rage, his own frank avowals and final victory. That task performed, how joyfully would it waft my Lord to Meaux, there to assist at a far more desirable scene of reconciliation and mutual forgiveness.

And indeed when Napoleon set forth from Compiègne, only half an hour after Muriel, he fully intended to seek the Earl, and soothe him with comfortable words. But—and there is shame even to write it—he got no farther than the Élysée. He reached it before luncheon. Not a single obstacle, great or small, arose to detain him, nothing save his own fatal irresolution, which marred every enterprise he set his hand to. What a comfort, had it been otherwise; had his purpose been hampered by events outside his own control: De Morin, for instance, absolutely forbidding this attempt at placation which could lead to nothing but more broken promises; or, again, an urgent message from MM. Carache and Prehlen to the effect that England had somehow got wind of their *pourparlers* and was collecting her lazy limbs to pounce.



Best of all, a reply from Nadez in the form of an attack upon his valuable life. The opportunity for such had been there sure enough. Napoleon, ensconced in an open carriage, had proceeded at a sharp trot homeward from the Gare du Nord. A block had stopped him full four minutes at the corner of the Rue Drouot. If only the Eurasian had jumped upon him then and stuck him through the stomach! Alas, none of these excuses were granted unto him. De Morin, Prehlen, and Carache, one and all left him severely alone. England lay still asleep, while Nadez was not yet ready.

To descend from the cloudlands of hypothesis, and resume our modest way along the surface of the earth. Napoleon—as has been mentioned already—reached the Élysée before lunch. He consumed that meal with all the heartiness of a man about to perform some noble action. He wiped his mouth with his napkin, and informed Godefroy that he would be in his library until three, “when,” said he, gazing absently at the remainder of the prunes, “I propose to take a little walk.”

Accordingly, at five to three the valet went into the library to poke the fire. Majesty lay full length upon a couch. A newspaper, fallen from his hands, enveloped him like some light coverlet: his vacant eyes were fixed upon the ceiling. The sight struck an instant chill to the marrow of the old man’s bones. He smashed every piece of coal the grate contained; he stabbed the scuttle in the back with one blow of the shovel; he flung the tongs and poker into their usual resting-place; and ended by brushing up the hearth the wrong way.

Napoleon groaned and turned his face to the wall.

“It is three o’clock.”

“Is it?” replied our hero in die-away tones. “I do n’t feel very well. Let me have a cup of tea in about an hour’s time.”

“The fresh air will revive you. Shall I bring you your fur coat? To my mind, you will find the light one heavy enough: it has turned quite muggy.”

“My—fur—coat?” queried the Emperor in a sort of meditative repetition; “my *dear* Godefroy, I do not feel well enough to go walking. No, I shall lie quietly until tea.”

The butler chucked the hearth-brush back into its corner with so correct an aim that it finished upright. Still on his knees, he turned and gazed venomously at his master.

"Not so much noise," implored the latter faintly. Godefroy rose, and came and stood directly over this interesting recumbent figure. The interesting recumbent figure commenced to wriggle.

"I thought your Majesty had an engagement."

"I never said so," which was quite true.

"You told me that you were going for a walk at three o'clock."

"May I not change my mind? I feel too ill to budge. Pray leave me to sleep; and—and be careful to close the door gently."

Godefroy shrugged his shoulders. "It is bright and fresh out of doors. Come, an hour in the Bois will do you good."

"Just now you said it was muggy."

"Yes, but there is a delicious breeze."

"No," said the prostrate ruler, after a short pause for reflection, "I sha'n't move at present. Bring me a cup of tea in an hour. And for heaven's sake shut the door gently."

Godefroy closed the door so gently that he failed to latch it. Consequently he had to bang it after all.

"I do n't know about other princes," he muttered as he sought his cabinet; "but that man is wretched indeed who puts his trust in this one."

Wretched indeed.

Muriel also reached her journey's end before luncheon. Meaux in November came as a strange sensation; and even stranger, any house therein except her father's. The Villa Yvonne, its beauties changed but not impaired by the dreary season, repelled her. The first sight of it, as their carriage turned off the road, struck a nameless dread into her heart. She shrank back trembling from the open doorway. The bright rooms, prepared in haste against her coming, were hateful to her even before she could take in their details. It was the terror of some poor, sentenced sufferer who carries his incurable malady

from place to place in the hope that at last he may leave it behind him, on reaching the final new abode his life will give him, and beholding for the first time the room and bed wherein he has to die.

Only one thing pleased her. The household consisted of a retired butler from the Élysée and his middle-aged wife, who was staid and prim to look at, and seemed of an incurious temperament. There were no prying lackeys, no pert waiting-maids to probe her sorrow. The gaunt female—she reminded the girl a little of Marie—helped silently disrobe her new mistress; then conducted her into a sitting-room, where the table was laid.

"The Princess will touch the bell when she wants me," was all she said. And having said so much, she left my Lady to the soup and her own devices.

Being merely about to benefit by some noble action, Muriel's appetite proved less robust than Napoleon's. In truth, she could not swallow a single morsel. She crossed into her bedroom—it opened out—and resumed her cloak and hat. She stood gazing idly down at the lawn and gravel-path that divided the villa from the road.

Their dilapidated fly still waited before the porch. She felt tempted to use it back to Meaux, and journey without a single break from Meaux to Tipton, where she had been born and bred, and wherein she fancied her perturbed spirit might find rest. Presently Brisson appeared upon the doorstep. He signed to the driver to depart empty; then set forth on foot and at a swinging pace.

Most of Muriel's heart went with him. He had performed his mission with such unobtrusive kindness. And it irked her to see any one leave her gilded prison-house. The place began to stifle her. The bright rooms, threaded from end to end with sunbeams, and warmed by cheerful fires that spluttered in hateful complaisancy, drove her mad. The tempting table brought a return of her recent sickness. The rich decorations and sumptuous furniture, the wealth of gaudily covered books, the meretricious nooks and corners, completed the tale of her misery, adding genuine terror to what had been

at first merely a feeling of uncomfortable dislike. The significance of it all commenced to dawn upon her brain. Yet what could this girl know of the Maintenons and Pompadours, the Du Barrys and Nell Gwynnes, or of the caskets forged to hold these priceless pearls? Before her fall, she had had neither the chance nor inclination to read about them; since, she had not had time—nor more desire, she who would have shrunk with fresh reason from the mere mention of their names. The knowledge of evil people and of their crimes reaches us through the medium of no direct instruction. It is parcel of the air we breathe. It enters us, when and how we know not; and it is always ready to our hands when our time comes.

She passed softly onto the landing. Everything seemed still. She was glad of it; she could not bear the face of any living soul. She meant to steal down to the riverside and spend the afternoon in solitude. The place might bear a very different aspect when she returned. Her parents would have assuredly arrived; De Morin perhaps with them, the bearer of a definite date. A cough startled her. The thin housekeeper sat darning stockings beside the stove: she had her back turned towards the door of Muriel's sitting-room.

She did not lift her eyes from her work:

"The Princess has found everything satisfactory?" she asked.

Muriel merely nodded. She resented this woman's encampment at her very gates.

"I am glad," the other went on, imperturbably. "Her Highness proposes to take a short walk?"

"Yes, I do," returned the still resentful Princess. "My mother and father will be here this evening," she added proudly. "Let them know that I shall be back not later than six."

"Very good. They will wish to have tea: it shall be ready for them."

She found the Marne much swollen, notwithstanding the dryness of the season. The fringe of lawn, her favourite resting-place in bygone summers, lay under water. Its guardian poplars were washed by the ebb and flow of muddy currents. Without a second glance

at this dreary scene, she sped across the bridge into her father's grounds. She seemed straightway to breathe a purer air. Her step grew more elastic. She had won her way back into the region of her childhood. For a single brief moment of bright forgetfulness she recovered the cleanness of those irrevocable days. She even commenced to dream; modestly, indeed, as befitted convalescence. The Villa Henriette would be fit to receive them. She could send back Pons to fetch her parents; and the three of them would spend the night under their own roof. No more Villa Yvonne! When she was Empress, the ill-omened place should pass out of royal possession for good and all. This pleasing project, alas, went the way of many others. The villa presented two cheerless rows of green shutters, and a padlocked door. The house might have held Elysium for its security. It held nothing else. She rang and shouted; nothing came save feeble echoes. She fled precipitately back to her sole poor haven. And she mounted to her rooms a good two hours in advance of time she had mentioned. The woman still sat darning.

"Is my father here?"

"No, Madame. Shall I bring tea?"

"I will wait. They cannot arrive much before six."

"Very good, Princess."

"Will you tell me your name?"

"I am called Eugenie."

"You need not wait in the passage, Eugenie. I can ring when I want anything."

"I always sit beside this stove," Eugenie replied with composure.

"Eugenie," burst out the girl under an uncontrollable impulse, "has Monsieur told you anything about me?"

"Your Highness means Marshal Brisson. Certainly. He informed me that you were an English Princess, a cousin of the Emperor's; and that you had some idea of purchasing this villa. Hence Madame's visit."

"And what becomes of you two, presuming I buy it?"

"We are to have Compiègne so soon as Monsieur August Fabre dies. He cannot last forever."



"Eugenie, why do you always sit beside the stove?"

"My husband snores in front of the kitchen fire. I cannot hear the bell."

"No one ever comes."

"But yes. You yourself Princess, came this morning: your illustrious parents arrive to-night."

"I shall hear them," cried Muriel. "You need not wait on their account."

"Thank you, I am comfortable."

The girl retired vanquished. The lamps in her sitting-room certainly made the place look cosy. The general warmth was not without its effect upon her spirits. But she would not have purchased the property did she possess exclusive cognizance of a gold mine underneath the front lawn.

She opened the bedroom door, that she might hear the earliest sounds of their approach. She chose a book by a French author upon the wonders of Cashmere, then seated herself beside the fire and began to think about the Élysée.

She knew the trains from Paris. Her lover's visit could not be made much before three. Probably five was nearer the mark. The last train reached Meaux at something after eleven; her parents must arrive not later than midnight. So she plunged boldly into the midst of Shrinagar, with complete success, for presently she passed into a gentle slumber.

She awoke to find Eugenie standing over her with the tea tray.

"Princess, it is nearly seven. Your illustrious parents have not arrived."

"Ah, they will come later. You did right to bring the tea. I am hungry."

"The supper is already laid," hesitated the woman.

"I shall wait until they arrive."

"At what hour does your Highness desire it served?"

"I cannot say," Muriel exclaimed, indulging in a little burst of petulance. "Do you not see that these details annoy me? Please leave me in peace."

"There is soup," Eugenie persisted.

"There may be."



She saw no more of Eugenie that evening. The night wore on as persistently as nights will when one is waiting for those who do not come. The fire settled lower and lower in the grate; her heart with it. Towards one of the morning she went supperless to bed. She sank into troubled slumbers that tried to find the cause of this cruel disappointment. Even dreaming, her brain kept asking whether it was that her father had proved adamant or her lover faithless. And then dreams vanished. The genuine sleep of childhood fell upon her eyes. Thrice fortunate had it never lifted more. The sun wakened her,—the sun, and the sputterings of a freshly kindled fire. Her breakfast lay beside her bed. One plate contained a letter directed in an upright hand to H. H. the Princess Elizabeth of Pierrefonds. It proved ten closely written sheets of love. The postscript held a tiny excuse for his latest treachery: "Dearest, I felt too ill to leave my sofa. I have devised a better plan; you shall hear it when we meet on Monday."

That was the first of many lonely days,—days wherein utter misery and dejection alternated with extravagant light-heartedness; the latter nourished on Napoleon's promises, which (written and spoken) were legion; the former begotten of her hateful dwelling and solitary condition.

His demeanour, it must be confessed, left nothing to be desired. He was unremitting in his attentions. Never a day passed without a letter; never a week without a visit. Divided from her, his words seemed to breathe a constant yearning for her presence; the which being granted, he treated it with becoming reverence. No shadow born of their common sin arose to sever them, as she had dreaded. Indeed, its memory seemed only to add sweetness to their intercourse.

As for his vows and genial projects, their number was as the grains of sand upon the shore. At the outset, the marriage would most certainly take place before the end of the current month. He and De Morin had been arranging the ceremonial "only the other day." Then, with the obstinate approach of Christmas, it became necessary to change the date to the first week of the

new year. Specious pretexts never failed for each fresh postponement. He was threatened with a ministerial crisis. De Morin had the gout, and could not superintend the details, arranged "only the other day." Sometimes Muriel touched upon the public announcement. His answer to that always came pat. "We cannot hide from ourselves," he invariably said, "that our marriage will raise a deal of opposition. All my advisers admit so much. We must not give it time to grow. A fortnight from start to finish will have to see the whole thing through. The announcement shall be made the instant we have settled our date. Patience, my darling."

Thus he wove a network of lies round both of them. And, as time went on, he dare not move a step within the narrowing area, fearful lest he might trip and lay bare his villainy. Not that he did not love her; but it was easier to tell lies than to fight his mistress. He fully meant to marry her.

They were soothing enough, these vows and projects, and daily letters breathing love. And here it may be remarked parenthetically that the girl was not ungrateful. She repaid her lover's devotion with as much cheerfulness as she could manage, and as few questions. Unfortunately, however, these diversions took up only a quarter of her time. Many an hour was left for sombre reflections. Truly, she had food for them. Her father gave no sign of relenting. De Morin's kind offices put her in communication with her mother: poor Henriette wrote every day. These epistles, meagre in respect of all things except lamentations, kept her fairly well informed of her kinsmen's movements. An occasional English newspaper supplemented what she knew. The gap widened every day. Her sceptre would have to be long indeed to span it. Her walks invariably ended somewhere near the Villa Henriette. One afternoon she crossed the bridge to find all further progress barred by a boarding which declared the house and grounds for sale. The same night her mother wrote that number forty-seven had already been disposed of. A stray *Times* mentioned that the new Viceroy had left town for Tipton-St. John; and that his Excellency proposed to sail upon

the Thursday week. An equally haphazard *Figaro* informed an astonished world that the Honourable Charles Mendril had been attached to the British embassy as third secretary.

Her favourite pastime during these hours of solitude was to piece out such scanty data, and, with the aid of details supplied by her sharpened memory, live their life along with them from day to day. "Father and Walter have just returned from hunting," she would whisper of an evening. She could see them drawing rein before the stable gates, splashed to their shoulders with red earth, half hidden in the steam of their panting horses. Or, again, having this to go upon that they were back in London and busy buying. She would picture her mother oscillating between shops and stores. "Dear mother," the girl would say, finding now how much she loved her, "I am sure she has already discovered that India will be detestable." Those real figures had gone to people her castles in the air. She began to think of them as of some desired dream long faded. They soothed her restless days. These, alas, were as numerous as Napoleon's promises. Who is not restless, who lives in the past and in the future, and has no uses for the present? Once Nicholas Fersen wrote. From Russia, whither he had gone, in ignorance, the very morning after the tragedy. His letter showed that he had heard since. Its delicate tact went straight to her poor heart. He said no word about his own longings, thus ruthlessly shattered, and his despair.

For an entire month, indeed, her solitude was but once broken by outside visitors. It was a certain afternoon, and she was reclining not over-gracefully in her easy-chair, idly turning the pages that told about Cashmere. A smile still hovered upon her lips. Napoleon was but that moment gone, after a morning spent in her company. He had arrived from Paris close on ten,—a thing before unheard of,—his face bearing all the signs of genuine depression. This token of his growing dependence flattered her. She had done her utmost to dissipate his gloom, and with complete success. Neither of them had ever talked more gaily or with greater con-

fidence of their future life. The hours flew by. At last Napoleon had had to tear himself away, his farewell a declaration (made in all good faith) that this visit had strengthened him more than words could tell. She looked at Shrinagar, Jumn, and Leh, in their many shapes, and thought only of Paris. She tried to follow the courses of the Jhelam River; while all the time she could not get away from the ermine marriage-cloak, whereof Napoleon had spoken. Eugenie entered.

"Two gentlemen and a little boy to see your Highness."

"Have they not told you their names?" she asked, bewildered.

"No, Muriel, we have not," said a stern voice, over Eugenie's shoulder. And the Honourable Charles Mendril walked sombrely into the room, followed at a reverential distance by his uncle Louis and his uncle Louis' little boy.

"Why, dear Charles," cried the girl, springing out of her chair, "this is a surprise. And you, dear uncle Louis,—and Paul too,—how kind of you to come. You will have lunch, of course."

A faint look of astonishment passed across Charles's face. He had come forth to see an interesting penitent garbed in sorrow and deep black. Yet, here was she dressed in white (in white, ye gods!), bearing no sign of her sin blazoned on her brow; not a whit altered from the clean-faced Muriel of other days. The ways of wrong-doers are inscrutable. He had not come to curse her, indeed his heart had been moved to a vast compassion by the whiffs of hot mutton in the hall; but he could n't stand this. He repulsed her coldly; and drew himself up to his full five foot four and a half.

She copied his movement. Her greater height gave her a distinct advantage.

"Uncle Louis," said he sepulchrally, his eyes still fixed upon his erring sister, "you and Paul will kindly leave us together for a few minutes. I have something to say to Muriel."

"Uncle Louis," she added fiercely, "you will please remain where you are. I have nothing to say to my

brother except this: if his only purpose in coming was to insult me, he had far better have stayed away. Paul, won't you kiss me?"

The boy ran forward with great readiness to fling his arms round her neck. His father likewise advanced to salute her. He was a man of kindly nature. Besides, he had had a little tiff with the Honourable Charles in the train.

When, a Sunday or so before, young Mendril suggested this visit, Monsieur de Murinac jumped at it as a very noble idea. And nothing arose to mar this perfect accord, to within half an hour of their journey's end. Charles had beguiled the tedium of the way with an account of his daily life and policy, what time he should become Premier. Uncle de Murinac devoured sandwiches; pretended to listen, and did n't. Paul devoured sandwiches, and did not pretend. "I suppose you *are* very clever," Louis had remarked at the end of his last piece of ham. Charles had smiled and bowed; he permitted himself these little indiscretions in his uncle's company. "You, also, uncle, are clever enough," he had responded affably, "only you have no application. We shall write on your tombstone, 'Here lies Louis de Murinac, ruined by a blue pencil.'" The shot had gone home. Louis started and flushed scarlet. Only that moment he had been meditating a magnificent scheme of repudiation, which should chalk out the debtor side of "hours wasted," and which should start afresh with a clean sheet on January 1, proximate, 189-. That is the reason why he kissed his niece with additional fervour.

Charles stood apart, his arms folded. He waited until these salutations were quite finished: his patience was displayed with much elaboration.

"Very well," said he, when they were ready, "you can please yourself. I made the suggestion for your own sake. If you prefer them to remain and overhear, I have no objection. Uncle—Paul—kindly seat yourselves."

"It is for me to say that, not you."

"I know," muttered the future Premier with bitter significance.



"Uncle," the girl pursued, "will you and Paul not take something to eat? You must be hungry."

Louis looked wistfully across at his nephew. "I have had some sandwiches, thank you." The faintness of his voice showed that he had not originally intended them as final.

"Enough of this," cried the future Premier from the opposite corner,—he had retreated before the unclean thing. "We have not come for food. We have business together, you and I, my sister. You must be good enough to favour me with your best attention."

"I refuse to listen to you. This is my ho— this is my room. If you choose to behave as any decent brother would do, as Walter would behave, if he were here, you are welcome to stop. If you do n't choose, then go! I won't be lectured by anyone, least of all by you."

He gazed at her with lofty contempt. "I was prepared for this," said he. "You ought to know by now that I am not the sort of man to be intimidated by shrill violence." He put one hand behind his back, the forefinger of the other he lifted in stern admonition.

"Now, Muriel, no equivocation! Tell me candidly, what do you mean to do?"

For the minute rage rendered her speechless.

"I ask you," he continued, "as much for your sake as for mine. One thing is clear; you cannot pursue this mode of life," and he surveyed the much-decorated room with the thunder of half a dozen Hebrew prophets upon his brow. "You cannot return to my mother. Uncle Louis remains. But would it be fair to cast such a burden on our kinsman's back? I venture to think not." Uncle Louis nodded a gloomy assent. "Muriel, can you answer my question? What do you mean to do? Where are you going?"

If her clenched hand had clasped some weapon at that minute, she would have killed him.

"You loathsome coward—"

"Tush! no recriminations, I beg. Let us be reasonable, my sister. I have not come to rake up the bitter past; to rub your sores afresh with vinegar. I am not of that sort. My one desire is to help you. I want to



save you from this life of sin. It is my duty to stretch out a strong arm for you to lean upon. True, you have smirched our name. True, you have broken my mother's heart; behold, I do not come to chide you for it. Nor do I intend to censure you for the harm you have done me. My sister, are you aware"—this last with a touch of divinely condescending pity—"that you have put me back some five years in my career. Lo, I forgive you. Thank God I am strong; I can bear it. I am not afraid. My bark will get home just as soon as Walter's. No, Muriel, I forgive you; and I come thinking only of you. My sister, you have not answered my question. What do you propose to do?"

"I do not want your help, you conceited meddler. You conceited fool! you selfish, conceited, ignorant fool!" She kept crying with the poverty of epithet which generally results from a wealth of passion. "I command you to leave this room."

"Your career!" she went on, shrilly laughing; "that's all you care about, your precious career! You have come to lecture me; let me give you this one word in return. You are too vain and vacillating ever to do anything. Walter beat you at school: he took the degree which you could not,"—she meant pass finals,—“and yet you fancy yourself to be much his superior. You are always chopping and changing about. The only thing you do with any consistency is to blow your own trumpet. Now go, you miserable coward.”

Some of her arrows went home. His yellow face flushed crimson. The ugly words wherewith he was accustomed to describe her in his own mind nearly burst forth in a foul torrent of vituperation. But he restrained himself.

A small voice within him kept whispering, "Now, Charles, rise to the occasion. Be worthy, my esteemed young friend, of your future destiny. A chance has come to prove your metal. Charles, be great!"

His greatness took the form of a sickly simper.

"Muriel, you push me very hard, but you sha'n't drive me from my purpose. You cannot reply to my question. Very well, I will supply the answer for you.

Listen, my sister. I suggest a convent. More than that. I have been to see the reverend mothers of the Assumption at Auteuil. They know your story. Provided you can assure them that there is no likelihood of any untoward consequences—"

"Really, Charles," the patient Louis was driven to exclaim.

"Untoward consequences," the Premier persisted, "resulting from your lapse from the path of virtue, they will give you a haven of rest."

"You shall pay for this, you coward," she almost shouted. "You shall pay for this, when I am married."

"My poor child," soothingly, "who would marry *you*?"

"When I am Empress, you may go to some other embassy then; you sha'n't stay in France."

"I shall stay in France just as long as I choose. Who is to turn me out, I should like to know?"

"I."

"Listen to her," then he stopped short.

"Muriel, your violence is enough to provoke an angel. I do not mean to lose my temper with you."

"What do I care what you mean or not? Who are you, that you should come and preach to me? Don't fancy that I don't know, you wretch! I know well enough that father had occasion only this spring to reprove you for some secret vice, you ugly, vicious hypocrite."

Charles caught his breath.

"How do you know that?" he cried. "You have been prying into father's letters. What a fool I am to suppose that one can do anything for a degraded woman like this. Live on as the Emperor's mistress, you filthy-minded harlot! It is all one to me."

And then a curious thing happened. Louis, who had sat all this while dangling his legs and gloomily surveying the combatants, suddenly roused himself from his torpor. It was nature reasserting herself. The man had come to one score years before the eldest of these wrangling children was begotten.

"No more of this, you miserable creatures," he interposed. His decided tones startled them amid their anger.

"Charles, I did wrong to let you come. You are unfitted for a task like this. Be good enough to leave us. You make me feel quite ashamed of myself. You may take the first train back to Paris. Paul and I will return later."

The Right Honourable gentleman actually obeyed these curt directions. He slunk out of the room. He slinks out of this narrative at the same time. It may seem unnecessary to add that England still awaits her great patrician premier.

Louis' demeanour towards his niece was at the outset not much less severe. He bade her go and bathe her head in cold water. The ruling passion strong in death! he always douched his own beard and chestnut locks after wasted mornings and massacred schemes. She returned refreshed, and Louis resumed his usual gentleness.

The remainder of the day passed pleasantly. The visitors supplemented their sandwiches; then the three of them went down to the river, and scaled my Lord's hoarding. De Murinac enjoyed himself immensely. His visits to the Villa Henriette, since his boyhood, had neither been few nor far between. But he chose to regard this present one as a renewal of acquaintance after long years. He determined to date his new scheme of life from that hour and that place. Perhaps it was the November sun. Perhaps it was the hoarding. Perhaps it was only the luncheon, and the Emperor's port. Anyhow, he became very sentimental, and made voluminous notes.

On their way back, Muriel talked to them unceasingly of Napoleon's kindness and devotion. Tea came as a valuable ally. The girl waited until her uncle was redolent of hot buttered toast to proffer a request, which had been long in her mind. It amounted to nothing less than this: that Paul might be permitted to stay on, then and there, for at least a week. Louis looked puzzled. His niece added, with a smile, that she would make it straight with the boy's employer. So the matter settled itself. And Uncle Louis, having kissed both children with much fervour, went off into the night.

Twenty years labor, at a ripe old age, he was discovered one morning dead in his library, seated before his desk, pen in hand, in front of him a nearly blank sheet of blue paper bearing these enigmatical words: "Mondays, rise at seven."

It must not be supposed that Napoleon found these weeks any the more endurable. His great victories had earned him peace without bringing it. Barely two months were gone by since the Preliminaries of La Grange-en-Haye, and his advisers spent night and day in attempting to manipulate an offensive Franco-Russian alliance against England. Her size, her insolence, her predatory instincts—they kept dinning—hampered the legitimate development of France in every quarter of the globe. "Go to Egypt," sang one journal, "you find perfidious Albion basking among the other crocodiles upon the sludge of the Lower Nile. Turn your thoughts to the far East,"—the writer was apostrophising Madame La Belle France,—"you discover her lurking within the shrines of Mukden and behind the curtains of Seoul. Like Satan, she is everywhere." His elevation to the throne implied a mandate to humble this sinister power in the dust. As Prehlen pithily puts it, "Britannia has done her thieving; so she wants to call 'time.' Properly speaking, we have n't begun ours."

The Russian ambassador, moreover, had a little side solo all to himself. It dealt with the Grand Duchess Catharine, daughter of Peter, and her glorious hair.

Never a day passed without some attempt on the part of one or other of the agitators to advance their cause. Prehlen presented himself with the freedom of the Élysée. He turned up directly after breakfast, and the last thing at night. Napoleon, re-entering his library from his lunch, would find him eating sandwiches in a distant corner. Signs of him began to scatter the whole room. Once, indeed, he managed to leave a portrait of the Princess upon the Imperial mantelpiece: finding it gone on the occasion of his next visit, he left another. Godefroy got this one also, and nailed it next its predecessor in his pantry. Prehlen was not to know that. He preferred rather to believe that his seed had fallen on good

ground. He put in his next despatch that his Majesty carried both presentments next his heart. They were cabinet size.

With regard to the Grand Duchess, the Russian government was prepared to give instant delivery. Their military propositions seemed a trifle hazier. As far as Napoleon could discover, they suggested that France should "humble perfidious Albion in the dust." In return for which the Queen's Eastern possessions were to be transferred *en bloc* to their own benevolent keeping. Certainly, the wise Norwegian left this department to other hands. The Premier, so to speak, did turns with his Excellency. No sooner had the latter relieved Majesty of his presence, when the door would open upon Carache.

Sometimes the latter came alone, and spent a cheerful hour in monologue. Sometimes he brought Mesnil. The Marshal invariably presented a neutral attitude. "Whether you go to war with England, or whether you do n't, 'tis all the same to me," it seemed to say; "only here are maps." Each time, too, he showed conclusively that he could be in possession of the Mansion House — "the seat of government" — within three days of landing, provided, of course, Fréron was not lying about the fleet. And each time, Napoleon would meet him with the selfsame answer: "My dear Mesnil, you are a terrible fellow. You would only have to show yourself in Parliament Square to send every public man post-haste into private life. I trust you won't forget the Temple. Several clever men of my acquaintance would be only too glad to have it razed to the ground." Whereupon the little strategist would bow and shrug his shoulders, as if to say, "I do n't care one way or the other; only here are maps."

In Muriel's matter, however, his advisers adopted quite other tactics. They simply burked discussion. Carache, Pontécoulant, even De Morin, became dumb at once when he tried the topic. They treated Meaux as forbidden ground. The nearest the Premier got to it was to ask sometimes if the Princess entertained hopes of — "your Majesty understands my meaning." And



then his Majesty merely blushed, without answering. Prehlen, whenever Napoleon hinted an obstacle to his union with the beauteous Catharine, would laugh and look knowing. This silent, soft impeachment of being "something of a fellow," my Lord always met with much complaisance.

Meanwhile, at all events he had his loved one with him. She gave him all he asked; she was altogether his. Except himself, she saw no one. Except himself, perhaps, no one loved her. What had he done to be so fortunate? And being so fortunate, surely a little procrastination could do them neither any harm. He was able to bear it.

At the commencement, Napoleon had sternly limited himself to two visits weekly. As time went on, however, his need of her increased. He came more often, and stopped longer. At last the larger half of his month seemed to be passed in her company. Thus that memorable day of many visitors—it may be remembered—included himself. On leaving, he had stated specifically that it would be a full week before his return. He came again two days later.

He entered her room unannounced. She and Paul de Murinac had their heads bent over a letter, which the lad was sending to Avize. It appeared to amuse them immensely. The missive inquired reverently enough how Louis XIV progressed: the joke lay in an inset picture wherewith the scribe had embellished his text. It showed his home, with Marie—an ancient nurse of theirs—taking refuge on the roof from the attacks of an infuriated bull. Majesty crept up gently to throw his shadow upon this primitive design. Muriel and he exchanged most affectionate greetings. It pleased Paul to see their devotion; but he rather wondered at it, all the same. He gazed at them, his brown eyes wide-staring. Napoleon smiled back with indulgence.

"Who gave my little page leave to absent himself from his duties?"

"I did," cried Muriel.

"I am dumb. But suppose, during this little holiday of his, some one had made a successful attempt upon



the life of his sovereign, what would Monsieur de Murinac have said then?"

Monsieur de Murinac looked shocked beyond words.

"Sire," he stumbled out with trembling voice, "I did not know. I imagined the others were sufficient."

"Do not tease the boy. Come here, Paul, and tell his Majesty sternly that you won't be teased."

"Well, well, Monsieur," Napoleon went on, wagging a finger at him, "we won't say anything more about it. But understand, I sha'n't rest securely in my bed until I have you back in the Palace. It is something to feel that you are ever at hand to defend your sovereign with your little person. Our duties, Monsieur, do not bring us often together. Nevertheless, rest assured I already know that I do not number in my whole household a more devoted servant than your little self."

This harangue gave great pleasure to the three of them. Paul bowed as ceremoniously as he could, seeing that Muriel already had her arms round her cousin's neck. "Listen to that," she exclaimed, unaffectedly jubilant. Then she pulled him into a corner of her capacious chair; and the boy, his hand clasped in her's, gazed admiringly across at Napoleon, whose pale face shone out from the darkness made by the deep shaded lamp. The child accepted the adventure as a peep into Elysium. He marvelled at Muriel's confidence and ease in the presence of this mighty Alexander. He envied her as well. He drank in their words with greedy ears. Napoleon's commonplaces won an importance they never obtained anywhere else. Before long our young friend's eager attention grew so marked, that the Emperor passed unconsciously under his sway. He liked homage and an audience; but he had never received it in quite such wagon-loads as this. His flow of harmless little affectations diminished in volume till it dried up altogether. He laughed and reddened. Presently he commenced to fidget in his chair.

Muriel laughed too. She tapped her cousin's shoulder. "Paul, you must not stare at Wal—at his Majesty. Where are your manners?"

The boy dropped his eyes, greatly confused.

"Paul fancies that we are about to disclose some secrets of state. Confess, Monsieur, you are dying to know whether the English have really landed in Asia Minor."

"No, your Majesty, it was not that," Paul blurted out in obvious reluctance.

"What was it, then?" The Emperor commenced to wag his finger. It was his one way of propitiating "young persons" under the age of sixteen.

"I was wondering why people told such lies about your Majesty."

Muriel coloured; and, mostly for her own sake, tried to check him. Napoleon possessed a larger soul. "Don't stop him," he interposed good-naturedly. "And what lies do they tell about us—me, my little man?"

"They say that Marshal Mesnil won the battle of Parfondrupt."

"Oh, indeed," cried the Emperor. His large soul could n't quite swallow that. "They say that, do they? And where was I—hein?"

"They say that you were over at La Grange-en-Haye, in bed."

Somehow Muriel did not feel quite so sorry for him as she ought to have done. But she rescued him with forgiving promptitude.

"All great men are maligned," said she, softly bringing her cousin's face round to meet her own. "As a matter of fact it was Marshal Mesnil who was in bed at La Grange-en-Haye. The Emperor had to take command in person, a most unusual thing."

And so she covered his retreat.

The next time Paul intervened in the conversation it was to refer to what Napoleon had just said about the draughts in the Élysée.

"I hope," the boy exclaimed, "Cousin Muriel's rooms will be free."

"You mean to use them, you little rogue."

"I shall sit there when she invites me." Nothing could move this young hidalgo from his natural dignity.

"Tell me, Paul, what favor do you intend to demand on Muriel's wedding-day?"

"When is the marriage to be?" asked Paul, ruminating.

"The first week in January," this very promptly.

"I shall ask for my commission in the Emperor's life-guards."

"But, you young monkey, we do n't take soldiers at your age."

"I shall be thirteen on Christmas eve. Some of the younger officers are only seventeen."

"Not nowadays."

"I will have my commission to keep until I can use it."

"You are entitled to it. Choose something else."

"I want nothing. I am perfectly contented."

"Happy man!"

"Ah, yes, I do remember something."

"Out with it."

"I should like to have Yvonne to stay for a week at the Élysée."

"You must go to her Majesty to do that for you. She and Monsieur de Morin will keep those matters in their hands."

"There is nothing else."

He spoke three minutes too soon. Eugenie glided in and beckoned him from the Presence.

"Monsieur Paul, your hot water is in your bedroom."

He felt tempted to ask whether Napoleon's offer was still open and carried with it the rights of anticipation. But a future officer in the life-guards must show that he knows how to obey. He obeyed. He bowed to Napoleon and the inevitable; kissed Muriel, and withdrew.

"He is a fine lad," said the Emperor. "Your uncle Louis has been here?"

"I told you so in my letter."

"I recollect. And your brother."

The girl's face darkened.

"Walter," she began. She called him Walter by

special request. He liked to be reminded of his forty years' wandering in the wilderness. Who does not?

He straightway commenced to soothe her.

"There, darling, don't think about the wretched fellow. I will hint to Lord Threpps that I should prefer him in another sphere of activity. It is rather a steam-hammer to crack a filbert," he added laughingly; "but I make no doubt the thing can be managed."

"Please do not do such a thing," cries this poor little Muriel. "I would not interfere with the wretched boy's prospects for worlds. He is only silly and young."

"He is older than you."

"Yes," sombrely; "but I am having a harder training."

He became gloomy at once.

"God knows," he exclaimed, "we both are having that. I am, I know. To-day for five mortal hours—five mortal hours, Muriel!—I have heard nothing but *Russia, Russia, Russia*. They sha'n't make me fight England. I won't marr—march into Belgium. I have had enough of war."

"Beloved," he went on, converting his anger into deep pathos, "you do n't know how this constant worry affects me. It is quite certain that my health is gravely impaired."

"We won't talk any more horrid business," she cried. "You came down here to rest your poor silly old brain; and I sha'n't and can't have you worried." So she dashed off into light-hearted words, and won for him entire forgetfulness of all unpleasant things; but not for herself. The process came easy to her from constant practice. How often had he turned up gloomy and depressed, or suddenly grown so in the very midst of laughter, as to-night. She would have to pay a heavy price for the ermine robe. She began to see that.

"Madame Verre's appearance at the ball last night," laughed her lover in reply to something she had said, "made a great sensation. De Morin declares she ought never to have been admittéd."

"What did she wear?"

"Very little. Something green, and shiny, and jin-

gling. She looked exactly as though she were covered with scales, like fish from the Drury Lane pantomimes." "She wants to keep the Élysée as dowdy as it was under the Republic."

"De Morin thinks so. I said to him, 'My dear Chamberlain, how are we to stop this sort of thing?'"

"And he?" very, very eagerly.

"You little sorceress, I believe you know already. 'No one can stop it,' he replied, 'except the Empress.' So, dearest, you will have your work cut out for you."

"I certainly shall not let her present herself in those clothes."

"Darling, you need not look so indignant. You, as well, will find it a difficult matter to stop her. One cannot turn her back at the door. The Minister of the Interior would soon make it very uncomfortable for my little Empress, if she tried that game on. You will be reduced to writing on the back of the cards, 'Guest's are expected not to wear fish-scales.'"

She laughed merrily.

"Moreover, Madame has her uses. She has grown very fond of Monsieur Prehlen; it must be those long walks at Compiègne—" he broke off abruptly. Of one accord their eyes left each other's face and sought the ground. "So she kept him from me the whole evening. I paid for it this morning, though."

The hateful clock gave the sign for parting. "Ten!" he muttered; "this is the misery of all my visits. You can't conceive how I hate this journey to Paris."

"You have a brougham at both ends, and a compartment all to yourself. You are not so greatly to be pitied."

"I do n't know."

"No grumbling?" she cried, springing towards the door. On her way, she brushed her hand lightly across his hair. "Come, do not dawdle. You nearly lost your train the other day, you know you did, you lazy fellow."

He followed into the passage and down the stairs. The place was wrapt in silence. Eugenie and her husband had retired. Through the fanlight of the front door descending Majesty could descry a tricolour cockade.



Muriel already held his coat outstretched. He smiled down at her bright upturned face.

"Is the carriage there?" she called out; the fanlight had come to be their accepted guide.

"Yes," he said, slowly descending the remaining flight. "It's early enough, in all conscience. You country people do not care how long your visitors have to kick their heels at the station, provided you get your proper amount of sleep."

She shook his coat at him.

"You only make it harder for me to tear myself away."

Without more words she forced him into his ample furs; buttoned the throat-button for him, leaving him to fasten the rest; and, holding a lapel in either hand, gazed a single instant into his face. Poor thing, it was the sole means left her whereby to hasten the date. He darted his mouth forward and kissed her full upon her lips. Then she let him go.

The minute after, she stood alone upon the porch, listening to his wheels that crunched along the drive towards the road. The sky shone with the brightness of a million stars. Afar off against the northern horizon, one could descry the lines of undulating wood, picked out with here and there a twinkling light. The circling path beneath her lay hardening with the frost; while along its surface crept the chill of the dying year.

She did not feel it to begin with, her frame still tingling with the emotions of that last embrace. Not many minutes, though, and it prevailed. It caught her feet, this icy marauder, and held them, moved slowly upwards to a lodgment in her heart. "What does this mean?" she murmured, terror-stricken. A second wave of frost rose whispering; she had no need to ask again: "You are his mistress," it murmured; "you will never be anything else. The hope you bear beneath your bosom will come neither too soon nor too late. Your child will be your shame, as you are his." The Emperor's carriage took a sudden turn into a nearer road. Once more she heard the grinding of his wheels, the clatter of his horses coming back to her through the

silence. She listened to them growing fainter and fainter, until all sound of them disappeared once more—this time for good and all.

On his next visit he brought with him an atmosphere of gloom that was invincible. Muriel, herself despondent, made but half-hearted attempts to cheer him. Rather she fell under the potent spell which melancholy always wields. Even Paul succumbed. His smooth brow darkened, reflecting theirs. Happily for him, his heart had neither part nor parcel in their sorrows.

"Paul," commenced fretful Majesty, fumbling in his pockets, "we want you back at the Élysée. The place is not properly guarded when you are absent."

"Paul is too young to understand your sarcasms."

"God knows I am not jesting," he retorted roughly. It was the first rude word he had ever given her. He saw how she winced under it, and his heart straightway softened.

"Come," he added, still sad, but with gentleness, "we must not worry this young man with our concerns. Tell me, my lad, where had I got to the other evening just before we began to discuss the draughts at the Élysée?"

The boy's eyes glistened. "You were telling me how you rode with Caspar Schmidt's message to headquarters."

"Ah, yes. I recollect quite well. To continue, then,—but, first of all, does Cousin Muriel care to hear it?"

"Cousin Muriel remarked that she did. She gave her assent not over-warmly, and with averted gaze.

"I ought to have told you, poor Müller did not at all like old Caspar's looks. He thought it might be a ruse—some spy come to murder me. You see, I had n't my little body-guard by me." The genial smile accompanying these words stopped short midway. A look of very deep anxiety took its place, passing like a shadow across the mobile countenance. The mobile fingers commenced to fumble once more in the Imperial pockets.

"Go on."

"Paul!"

"The boy is right. The incidents would hardly pay

for dawdling. Well, I bade the old fellow good-bye and started off at once for La Grange. Mesnil had retired for the night, though it was scarcely ten. I roused him. He, with me, saw the extreme importance of the old fellow's news. I sent out orders in all directions; and by midnight my main body was well on its way to check-mate Rumperheim at Parfondrupt. I, of course, stayed behind, to—to—ah, to keep up a connexion with Marshal Clisserole, who was tackling the Germans near Francheville. In that way I got a look in at both engagements."

But when Paul had departed, Napoleon relapsed into melancholy. His restless hand strayed back to that soul-disturbing pocket.

"I have quite made up my mind," said Muriel slowly, between many breaks, her eyes bent upon the glowing embers, "I sha'n't wear the sables. The weight, added to the heat and excitement, would be too much for me. I never could get through the service."

No answer.

"I was thinking the matter out yesterday," she went on with raised voice, though her eyes could not rest upon his face. "Madame Reclame declares she can make me up a robe to look exactly like sable, and only half the weight. Certainly it won't come much cheaper; but we sha'n't mind that," and she laughed. "You do not seem to be very interested."

"Why should I be? It is not a matter that concerns me."

"What ails you?" she asked fiercely; next minute she regained her refuge among the coals.

His face deepened into fretful discontent. "Oh, Muriel," he pleaded, "don't be angry with me: you cannot guess how worried I am."

"What have you there in your pocket?" coldly.

"Nothing, nothing." He smeared his hand across his eyes to emerge smiling faintly.

"Your sable cloak—ah, yes. I think you do quite right to accept Madame's offer. Sable is terribly heavy, as I learnt to my cost at the coronation. But mind, no tricks. If you find that Reclame's substitute is a poor

one, you must have sable, though we only get a day to make the change. I want my darling to look an empress."

"Have you fixed the date?" she asked.

"Carache was speaking to me about it only to-day." He refrained from adding the Premier's actual words. They had been in answer to a very determined onslaught on his own part. Here they are: "I shall be glad when the autumn comes again, and your little one with it. The Princess and you won't think any further about such trivialities as these. Believe me, sire, in kings the heart is nearest the left hand."

"And what did he say?" she hesitated.

"Oh, he agreed that the first week in February would be well enough."

Was it the dying fire that turned her face to scarlet? "It must not be later," she said, "for the sake of—"

"I understand," he responded with deep reverence. Then he recommenced fumbling.

"You *have* something in that pocket. Walter, what is it that keeps worrying you?"

"Nothing, nothing."

"It is a poor thing if I am only to share your magnificence and not your burdens."

"I had intended not to let you know," faltered our hero.

"I was too sharp for you," she cried, making this concession to his vanity. "Let me know all, I beg of you."

He drew forth a letter.

"See!" he cried, in a squall of passion which served alone to accentuate his feebleness; "see what they have had the insolence to send me!"

Muriel took the missive from his trembling grasp. It was beautifully written in running Italian hand. Nor could its contents be said to display any the more those qualities of offensive directness which characterize its kind.

"Illustrious Emperor," it began, "I, one of the humblest of your subjects, beholding the misery of my fellows, feel compelled to relieve you of functions to

which you are not equal. Believe me, sire (observe I give you all your titles to the last), I do not blame you for your incompetence. Man is not fitted for authority: failing an angel to rule over us, we must have chaos. You, your brother emperors, kings, presidents, aye, even humble gendarmes, all, in your several stations, are alike incapable. You personally are a wise man. You have had your boyhood among those that are governed and oppressed. Without doubt you are conscious of your own unworthiness. Meaux claims half your days; willingly would you surrender it all. Willingly would I permit. I have no desire to wrap you from the arms of that fair creature, your mistress, whom all France knows. Gladly would you lay down your sceptre, did you consult your own heart. Alas, tradition, foolish conventionality, alike bind you. You can surrender it to the dagger alone. The pity of it. I, who have no spite against you, must be your executioner. Like the hangman in your adoptive country, I first offer you my hand. Forgive me, dear friend. And the charming Princess Elizabeth of Pierrefonds, I ask her forgiveness also. Let me repeat, I am only your executioner. Your judge is elsewhere. You must seek him from amid the teeming crowds of those that are governed and oppressed.

“(Signed) NADEZ.”

“I wish I had him here,” she muttered between her teeth. “How did you get this?” she went on to ask of her lover with peremptory abruptness.

“I found it laid upon my library table. That is the terrible part about the whole business.”

“There must be a traitor within the Palace.”

“A traitor! I have not a living soul about me whom I can trust.”

“Have you shown this to any one?”

“De Morin and Carache; no one else.”

“What did they say?”

“Carache said nothing. De Morin laughed, and declared that it was just like his dear friend Nadez.”

“They suggested extra precautions?”

“I am always guarded,” he muttered, “save when I come here.”



"Then it was imprudent of you to come."

"My heart, I could not stay away," he ejaculated, glancing anxiously at the door.

She thought a while.

"Why do you not have this impudent fellow arrested? You know where the wretch lives."

"You have touched precisely upon the part which maddens me most. Listen to this; it will show you what amount of power the Emperor has."

"The Emperor has just what amount of power he chooses to take."

He broke away into peevishness.

"You talk like all ignorant people. Presently you may see fit to change your views. Have you finished with that letter?"

"Let me burn it?"

"For heaven's sake, no," he shouted. "I have to send it to the Prefect in the morning." He thrust it back into his pocket, keeping his fingers on it, perhaps to help his story.

"That evening at Compiègne,"—there was no need to specify it further,—"De Morin, acting upon my orders, telegraphed Carache to have all the conspirators arrested. It was to be a species of *coup d'état*. Nadez, Loog, that cur Changarnier, Nadez's disciples, my brute of a cousin, were to be under lock and key by midnight. Consider what a splendid idea it was of mine. These wretches would have had time neither to communicate with one another nor to destroy compromising documents. Precious, would you believe it, Carache and his myrmidons refused point blank to obey my instructions! They advanced any number of specious reasons; but De Morin hit the mark when he said that Carache desired to incriminate as many of his opponents as possible. Directly I got back to town, I had an interview with this turbulent minister. I gave him a good slice of my mind, I can tell you. He merely shrugged his shoulders. Either the matter must be managed his own way, he said impudently, or I must get other advisers. What answer could I give to that? How can I get other advisers while this fox keeps his majority? Mesnil—I and Mesnil that is—

wage a successful war for him to reap all the glory. The thing is too monstrous. The way people vote for him and applaud him, one would fancy that he, not I, was the victor of Parfondrupt. These French are miserable ingrates. Muriel, I would to God I could rid me of this accursed empire,—say for a couple of hundred thousand. You and I would have a little cottage at Virginia Water: we would forget thankless man. How happy we should be."

She waited till he had quite finished this muddled tirade; then she put him back on his right road.

"So you had to give in. What happened next?"

"This atrocious letter, yesterday. I sent at once for Carache, to inform him that I would brook no more delay. He is conceited enough, heaven knows; but his vanity does not hinder him from being the most incompetent jackass in Europe. Here is what he replied."

"Go on."

"He agreed quite coolly that the time had come for action. He had already sent, the preceding evening, to arrest Nadez. Unfortunately—and he had the impertinence to smile—the bird had flown. Muriel, the bird has flown! The whole lot of them have disappeared, except Felix and Changarnier. Naturally, we dare not take them without the others."

"This is very serious," she murmured.

"You are right, it *is* very serious. Carache professes to make light of it. He says that Nadez was seen entering his house only four hours before the police arrived there. But that's two days ago. The vampire may well be out of Europe by now."

"You won't mind if he is."

"Maybe not. Still, it is a humiliating thing that he should have been suffered to scatter these letters broadcast with impunity. And there is no certainty that he won't reappear. He may be hiding somewhere in Paris at this moment. If he is, my life is not worth half an hour's purchase."

"I wish I could meet him," she muttered once more between her clenched teeth. "Are you armed?" she asked presently.

"No," he groaned with pathetic candour. "Carache advised it. But I am sure I should shoot some entirely inoffensive person—any one who approached me rather too quickly, you know."

"You do well to treat the matter as a joke," she soothed him. "Ridicule is the best weapon against such threats. Nevertheless, you ought to have a revolver. He spoke about a dagger, did n't he? Let me see, is not that how they killed the poor President?"

He shuddered. "Muriel, as you love me, do not speak about it."

"One ought to take reasonable precautions. You should wear a leathern breastplate: it stops—" She stopped as well, and looked at him in surprise.

His eyes were fixed in terror upon the door behind her.

"Muriel," he whispered, "the handle is moving."

For a moment she too sat paralyzed, nor dared turn her head. It was the fear of a single instant. The next, she rose brusquely, swept forward and flung the door wide open.

"Nothing," she cried. "The wind must have moved it."

"Come back," he implored, "and lock it."

"Nonsense. Your nerves are unstrung. The door does not lock: the key turns and nothing happens," and she shut it to.

She resumed her seat. Beads of perspiration studded his brow. Really she could not pity him.

## Chapter XII

"What is the time?" he inquired faintly.

"Ten past nine. You can see the clock."

But he had eyes for nothing save the handle of the door, which was brass and oval, and fluted with concentric channels not altogether agreeable to the palm. To-night it reflected a ray of the slowly dying fire, and by this alone one might detect its slightest movement.

"Ten past nine. I think—I think—yes, I will start at once, and walk."

"The most foolish thing you could do. If they are really tracking you, they will kill you in the lanes with the greatest ease. You must wait here in peace for your brougham. And another time don't venture so far without an escort—unless your nerves get stronger."

She broke off into a recital of events, which she fancied might interest him and divert his mind,—Paul's sayings, for this silent worshipper had won some tiny corner of the Emperor's heart; Eugenie's obstinate taciturnity; her own rambles down by the river-side, where they had had their first meeting. Her lover pretended to listen, and heard never a word. He only watched the door, and wished to God he knew the number of his days and their ending, that he might see how long he had to live, and thus pass through the present juncture with the calmness befitting his great position.

"Muriel," he whispered once more and with increased terror, "the handle *is* moving. I can see it—now—again—my God, Muriel, this is your doing! You har—you have decoyed me to murder me!" and he recoiled with starting eyes and wide-parted lips from some advancing horror.

She turned, faintly hoping to see the door blown open by

the wind. But it was Nadez this time. She recognized him at a glance. His yellow visage, the colour of curry; his bloodshot eyes gleaming with fierce triumph; his graceful figure deserving of a better face,—all helped her on to his identity: sufficient of themselves to disclose it, had she not had his name already in her mind, nor seen his presence in her lover's eyes. A squat revolver hung from his right hand; the girl caught the blue glint of the barrel as it nestled against the sober black of the Eurasian's trousers. (The assassin had actually had the insolence to come in dress-clothes. A single diamond, the size of a small cabbage, glittered from his spotless bosom.) Her fertile brain instantly devised some pretext for a parley. Let her only get that little shining instrument from him, he should taste the forgiveness of the "charming Princess Elizabeth of Pierrefonds."

She cast a single glance at her lover and seducer. There was no help to be looked for from that quarter. Neither his eyelids nor his mouth had moved an inch. She never knew before that human fear could go so far.

She advanced boldly to meet the intruder.

"Who are you? What do you want?"

His hot eyes rested for an instant on this fragile form. They seemed to devour her face and figure. She preferred the former look of murder to this whiff of desire.

"Not you, Princess;" and his voice came singularly sweet and fresh: "at least not just at present."

His sensuous chin and puffy cheeks were Asiatic. So, too, his swart mustaches, that resembled tufts of horse-hair. The forehead alone, and the nose above the bridge, showed that he counted Europeans among his forbears. Below the bridge the latter feature became flat babu.

"You have come to murder the Emperor," Muriel continued. Strange as it may seem, she was calm enough to take in all these details. "Then let me tell you his Majesty is not here."

"Of course not. The gentleman behind is your Highness' papa. Dear lady, these little ruses were buried with Mary of Scotland. We do not use them nowadays." He was up to her by now. He seized her wrist, still devouring her with his greedy eyes. "Now, Princess," said he,



lifting the muzzle of his revolver to the lace that edged her bosom and lowering it instantly, "the Emperor and I must have a few words together. You will have to leave us. Come, do not make force necessary. I should feel it bitterly. You are a very charming young lady. I admire my sovereign's taste. Perhaps—perhaps—after he and I have finished our business you may feel inclined to permit me to partake of that felicity which he was to have enjoyed. I bear him no ill-will. He takes what he can get; so do I. Go to your bedroom, dearest, and await my coming." He leered down at her, clothing her with indignant shame.

"Napoleon," she cried, "can you sit by and let this man insult me? Rouse yourself, you coward. We two are strong enough."

"You wicked woman," the Emperor murmured in dazed accents; "you have decoyed me."

Nadez burst out laughing.

"Do you hear him, Princess? He's a fine lover, is n't he? I sha'n't suffer by comparison with him. At least, you will find that you have got a man in exchange. I say, Princess,"—and the monster actually bent down to whisper in her ear—"how did a creature like that manage it? You are a real Zenobia."

"Napoleon," she cried, once more trying to free herself, "rouse yourself!—you black-hearted coward."

"Oh, Muriel, it is useless," he groaned.

"Altogether useless. If his Majesty stirs a finger, I shall have to kill you. And then you will be about as much good to me as was the Princess de Lamballe to her admirers."

She did not understand his monstrous allusion. The Emperor did; and, to do him justice, it whipt his heart almost as much as did his own personal peril.

That he had this man safe grasped within his arms!—he would tear him limb from limb. And he knew that a sudden spring might possibly save him. His assailant and he at close quarters; the wretched pistol, which he dare not look at, tumbled on the floor; and the result of their encounter might be rather different from what the hideous half-caste seemed to expect. But it

meant Muriel's life. Muriel — Delilah no longer—whom he loved with all the additional heat that came to him from the sight of Nadez's desire. For her sake he dare not move; but must continue in that paralysis of terror which was no longer altogether genuine. Perhaps with Muriel gone, he might succeed in buying Nadez off. So he bartered a good chance for a bad one; content meanwhile to suffer his insults and her contempt. And in judging him, this should never be forgotten.

"Muriel," said he, hoarsely, "do as this man tells you. Leave us together."

"You hear what he says," laughed the Eurasian.

"You won't find it difficult to transfer your affections from a man like that, will you? I sha'n't be able to give you a throne. A throne?—What am I talking about? He will never give you one—I mean, he would not have done so, even had I never appeared to hinder him. My dear Princess, you have given him too much already, for there ever to have been a fair exchange."

"You cur," she blazed out, turning upon her lover, "can you sit there and hear him speak to me like that? Spring!—never mind me."

He shook his head. "Useless . . . useless. Leave us, my dar—Muriel."

She turned away with a gesture of bitter contempt. "No one can save a creature like that. I will obey you." This last to Nadez. She moved towards the door.

"That is a wise young lady. Recollect, after business comes pleasure. Another thing, Princess; men surround the house. It is useless for any one to try and leave it."

It was a piece of Nadesian bluff. As a matter of fact he was "placing" this coup single-handed. The sole other male within five miles was little Paul; and that's forgetting the butler, who snored in front of the kitchen fire.

He bowed her out with elaborate courtesy, keeping one eye all the while on Napoleon. He closed the door quickly after her, turned the key which didn't lock, and placed it in his pocket. He took Muriel's chair. Laying his revolver well within reach upon the table, he

proceeded to survey this sentenced son of Woden from top to toe.

Napoleon presented a truly piteous spectacle. His passion had departed with his mistress: he was once more paralysed with fear. He strove to speak; his parched mouth could not frame a single word. Nadez, with his nose, that ended in pure babu, sniffed up all these little marks of cowardice. Henceforward he did not pay so much attention to his weapon.

"Of course you have your price?" Majesty at last managed to falter out.

"Sire, who has not?"

The victim commenced to breathe again.

"Name it."

"Do you tell me what you are prepared to give?"

"Money," cried Bonaparte; "more money than you have ever had in your life."

"Three million francs?"

"Yes, you shall have them. Three million francs — let me write you an order."

"Stay where you are. Three million francs — good; and you will throw in the wench besides?"

He meant H.H. the Princess Elizabeth of Pierrefonds.

"You may have her."

"Your Majesty has done with her, hey?"

"I have done with her," repeated our hero, echoing the other's ugly laugh.

"You are a pretty lover. Make your mind easy. You can keep your money and your mistress for so long as you will have need of them. No, sire, I won't torment you further. You must die. Personally, I bear you no ill-will; I am merely your executioner," and he leered across at his prey, over whom the pallor of death was already stealing.

"You must die; I regret to say, very speedily. I have to catch your train. I shall give you seven minutes wherein to prepare for death. If you desire to pray, pray. Don't mind me."

Nadez laid his watch beside the pistol.

"I could wish," he went on, "that it were possible

for me to turn away. Nevertheless, endeavour to forget my presence. I do not believe in God myself; still, I shall not mock. Kneel, if you so wish. You have good reason to believe in Him and be grateful to Him. And I daresay you prefer not to go direct from her Highness's society. Exactly seventeen to ten: the time has begun."

"You are doing a very cowardly thing."

"I am obeying orders."

"Who orders you to mur— slay a defenceless man?"

"Who asked you," the Eurasian retorted, "to impose yourself as Emperor over millions of your superiors,—you, whom the death-summons finds carousing with a harlot? Personally, I do not blame you for having a mistress; and I admire your taste in the present instance. I mean to borrow her from your estate. But my private opinion is neither here nor there. Europe won't be edified to learn where and how you died: Europe expects something better from her rulers. I shall have to tell her that I found you chambering."

"You shall have a title," urged Napoleon.

"Pah, what do I care for that? Sincere thanks, my noble sovereign, I prefer to remain plain Monsieur Nadez. The Count of Meaux, forsooth! People would mock at me as much as they do at your Princess of Pierrefonds."

"Is there nothing that can tempt you?" In a fervour for his life, he got himself to speak the wretch's name. "Look here, Nadez, you shall have rooms in the Élysée and a share of my throne."

"And if I bring the Princess to live with me, you won't tamper with her?"

"No. You shall be virtual ruler of France. Pause Na— Monsieur Nadez. Take the chance I offer you; it is worthy your acceptance. And it will save you from a cold-blooded mur— assassination."

"Again I must beg you not to stir from your chair. You have four and a half minutes yet to run."

"Will you not accept my offer?"

"Why should I? Who am I that I should govern? I am also an incompetent and licentious man. I, too, like

my ease and pretty women, and, with yourself, am something of a coward when I am unarmed. Take my advice and pray a little."

"I will go back to Pimlico."

"It is too late."

For a while there was silence. Nadez, notwithstanding his friendly counsel, was the first to break it.

"Carache is a cunning fox," said he.

"Too cunning," came the sullen answer.

"He imagined that he held me in the hollow of his hand. Thanks to your own ardent temperament, I have trapped you without fuss or bother. Yet had you never strayed from your escort, we should have killed you, all the same. Three fourths of France are on my side. In Paris alone I can count two million desperate men as my devoted slaves."

"You are not a Frenchman," Napoleon exclaimed with some show of spirit; "that is my answer to your boastings."

"No more are you."

"You are not a Frenchman. I do not believe you could find a single genuine Frenchman to side with you against the victor of Parfondrupt."

"You mean the hero of La Grange-en-Haye," laughed Nadez. "I wish the Prussians could see you now."

"You are not a Frenchman," Napoleon repeated. "Frenchmen are not cowards. Throw away your pistol; then we will see who is the better man. You dare not, you half-bred mongrel." The yellow face took a deeper tinge; the assassin's fingers strayed towards their ally.

"Pah, why should I fight with you? Prepare yourself, you sinner, to meet the angels. Don't die snarling. You have three minutes left you. I forgive you your abuse."

The minutes ebbed away to death. And all he could think about was his bedroom in Pimlico. How he regretted those unexciting nights spent nestling under the warmth of his insignificance.

For the third time that evening he saw the brass handle slowly turn. His mind, invested to some extent with the activity denied his body, whispered a coming



rescue, and whispered also that he must play his part. Nadez sat watching him like a cat. Let this swarthy murderer detect the faintest dawn of hope, and all was lost. So his vacant eyes continued to wander about and beyond the Eurasian's chair: in reality, they never left the door.

"It swung gently forward. Paul, in night-shirt and bare feet, stole in on tip-toe. Eugenie followed; while Muriel brought up the rear. Napoleon could not stifle a sharp burst of laughter.

"My poor friend," purred Nadez, "you are becoming hysterical. Only one minute more. Try and calm yourself: you have my deepest sympathy." He stretched out his hand to take the pistol. Half-way, he withdrew it, empty; and set himself instead to roll a cigarette.

"Ugh," he exclaimed affably, "you cannot conceive how I loath the smell of blood. I shall perform the operation with the greatest care. Doubtless you will prefer the head—about here, perhaps?" and the monster tapped his own right temple.

"You are doing a very cowardly thing."

They crept nearer, keeping in Indian file, with Paul leading. No sound escaped them. Nadez heard nothing: Napoleon seemed to hear the beating of their hearts. The distance gradually diminished.

The boy's face was ashen. His eyes shone with unwonted brilliance. And all the while the sand was filtering through for both of them. The Eurasian's first. He might have felt the child's shadow. The next instant, with a cry of uncontrollable excitement, the latter sprung forward, and wound his arms round the half-caste's neck. Simultaneously Eugenie swept his arms and pinned them to his sides. Muriel snatched up the pistol. Nadez made superhuman efforts to be free. He strove to rise and shake his assailants from him. They were swaying like reeds before the wind.

"I cannot hold him much longer," shrieked Eugenie; "quick, quick; kill the devil!"

Muriel strove to thrust the weapon into her lover's hand. He could not take it.

"Do you hear? Kill the dog, I tell you."

"Oh, Muriel, I cannot."

Nadez had risen to his feet. Another minute and he would be free.

"For God's sake, Mademoiselle," shrieked the servant, "kill him! we cannot hold him." With a last convulsive effort the two forced him back into his chair.

Without a second thought the girl sprang forward and laid the muzzle against his temple. He ceased struggling: he was rigid with terror. And as for her; the taste of blood was already in her mouth. She remembered alone his insults, and how she hated him.

"These are my favours, you cur," and she pulled the trigger.

His death-agony freed him. He rose to his full height, and looked round him with a dazed expression. Then he fell forward in a sprawling heap upon the table. The blood splashed the lace about her bosom. Eugenie gave a cry of mitigated concern, which was not for the defunct: his Majesty had fainted.

## Chapter XIII

New Year's Eve, and all Paris, capable of freezing frozen, from the surface of the Seine to the tips of Monsieur Prehlen's fingers, as that cheerful individual sat smiling in his room. The Ambassador had just breakfasted. The table, bearing dregs of coffee and broken bread, lay pushed to one side. His legs were straightened as far as they would go, his stomach was to heaven, while he toyed with his beard.

He could afford such obvious complaisance. The night preceding had gotten itself the victory for all his labours. The dying year would crown the last pinnacle of a not unsuccessful life. He felt the glow of *Nunc Dimittis* in every fibre of his body. How he regretted Carache's little girl. What sugar-plums he would have sent her, this happy festive season. The dear fellow's expansive mood cried aloud for a confidant,—some one to listen how he and the Prime Minister had piloted their skiff home through many a storm and not a few threatenings of shipwreck. But Mademoiselle Leduc was starring in the Provinces, and his attachés were busy at their desks, save his favourite, who had gone to Russia to see a mother and pass November examinations, and who might be back any time in the new year. The young gentleman in question chose, however, the last morning of the old. Passengers from St. Petersburg, provided their tastes lie that way, can land in Paris about eight. Monsieur's clock showed ten. His valet, entering to clear, mentioned incidentally that Count Fersen had just that minute returned.

Excellency gave a little scream of delight. He ordered the dear boy to be brought in at once, his breakfast with him. Nicholas came, looking pale and glum.

The kind chief thrust him into the cosiest chair, and chafed his cold hands, and plied him with endless questions about Dmitroff and the Baroness and the Tsaritza and St. Petersburg and his examinations. Most of these, by the way, Prehlen had to answer as he put them; for the boy never thawed, though the other drew the breakfast table under his very nose. And when the Ambassador grew tired of this colloquial monologue, he began to talk about the course of his own affairs since his favourite's departure. Thus he fell by easy stages into the topic of yesterday's triumph. Fersen shook off some of his indifference. His pallor by-and-by changed to a glow that was not one of health. His eyes began to burn with an unpleasant brilliance, which the narrator took for admiration. He only interrupted once; and that not until quite towards the end.

Here is Prehlen's artless tale.

"I will not conceal from you, dear Nicholas, the day you left for Dmitroff, our prospects were extremely gloomy. The night prior to your departure, while we guests were sleeping peacefully, a terrible scene was enacting itself in Bonaparte's apartment. The irate father had only that afternoon appeared at Compiègne, as you recollect; and he did not waste—but you have heard all since?"

Nicholas nodded.

"Then I need not trouble. At breakfast, next morning, I scented a rat; but could n't get a word out of any one, though I expended ten Napoleons in the attempt and was the last visitor to leave the Palace. You left quite early, you remember. I followed you to the Gare du Nord to bestow a last embrace upon you,"—as a fact, they had crossed, Prehlen having been on his way from Compiègne,—"and when I arrived here, I found De Morin waiting for me with a full account. He told me that papa and mamma had flung the young lady off, and had departed for India in a huff. Also, that the girl was then on her way to Meaux, where she would remain until her marriage. I say, Nicholas, she'll have to stay there a long time. He likewise informed me that Boney was madly infatuated, and had created his mistress a princess

as earnest of his honourable intentions. Nicholas, you wince; you are in pain, dear boy.

"To continue. My child, you know your old god-papa; how trouble merely tightens his tough old nerves. From that day forward, I devoted myself entirely to his Majesty's welfare. I never left him. From morn till dewy eve (Sundays included) I pottered about his study. I hung over him while he wrote; I nestled at his elbow while he read. Whenever he lay prostrate upon the sofa—which was pretty often—I bent down and smoothed his weary brow. Nicholas, for eight weeks I have been father and mother and grandfather and uncle and tutor and niece and cousin to this poor young man; and my reward is here at last. Mind, dear boy, I never worried him. For hours I would sit talking about everything in the world except the beauteous Catharine Petrovna and our alliance. And then, just before the little fellow's bedtime, I would throw in a single word about their depredations and her dreamlike face. Remember my methods, Nicky, when I am dead. They are the only effective ones. Sometimes, too, I would strew the girl's portraits about the room,—cabinet size, Nicholas! I have reason to believe that they immediately found their billets in the breast-pocket of the leathern cuirass, which I understand he never takes off. And once I left one of our Foreign Office globes—you know what I mean, wherein England and her dependencies are divided between ourselves and France—upon his desk. Next day, I found it in a corner, smashed to smithereens; so you perceive that that seed was sown in good ground.

"And thus I laboured in my vineyard for close upon eight weeks. While you were idling hand in hand with your dear mother about Moscow, I was spending my life's blood in the service of my country. Nicholas, from morn to dewy eve—let me see? I have told you that already. To proceed. A fortnight ago my good friend and ally, Monsieur Carache, warned me of a distinct development in the situation, consequent upon Nadez's unsuccessful attempt. You have, of course, heard all about that amusing business, and you doubtless are aware that Meaux was the scene of the murder. Little Plon-Plon



the Second *is* a funny fellow. He actually regards the Eurasian's foiled pistol as a punishment from heaven for living in forni— Nicholas, you are not well. Three mornings after this adventure he sent for his Prime Minister and gave us notice of his immediate intention to marry the Princess Elizabeth of Pierrefonds. (You recognize the lady?) From that hour forward up till two o'clock this morning one or the other of us never left him. Sometimes Carache took night duty, sometimes I did. Yesterday was his turn. He relieved me just before tea-time; I said good-night to Majesty, and came home to supper and a quiet evening.

"Nicholas, the interest thickens. I must have your very best attention. I had made a fairly satisfactory meal, and was toasting my feet at the fire, when a messenger rushed in, breathless, with a summons from Carache to return at once. I found little Bonaparte stretched upon his sofa, in tears. Felix knelt beside him, trying to soothe him; the Premier stood at the table, measuring out a draught. On the floor lay a letter from the Princess—oh! such a cruel letter! I ventured to appropriate it. You shall see it, if you are a good boy.

"But you shall have our very words. They are history. 'Hoity-toity,' said I, looking round me. 'What's the matter with our gracious master?'

"'Ss'h,' said fat Felix, and he wagged a finger behind his back; 'Carache, I fancy our dear boy is sleeping.'

The Premier trotted round with the graduated phial. 'There, Monseigneur, get him to take this. It's only sal volatile; it will soothe him.' As he passed me on his way back to the table, he whispered, 'My lady has done the trick this time. She's written him a rouser. He's in a mood to do anything we want.'

"The Imperial sobs grew less frequent. Fat Felix commenced softly cooing to him. Really, it was all I could do to keep myself from laughing outright.

"'Did she send him nasty, horrid letters, and say that he had delayed another week and was a wicked traitor in consequence? Then his cousin, who never meant to do him any real harm, but only went with Nadez and Loog to keep them in hand, will comfort him. And when

he is a wee bit better he shall come down to Auteuil and see my little Swedish dicky-bird and my allegorical picture.' And if you will credit it, Nicholas, the insane creature proceeded to give an account of that masterpiece.

"Meanwhile Carache and I were rummaging. My word, Nicholas, the rubbish we found! There were portraits of the Princess in every conceivable attitude, and bundles of letters (many of which I kept), and withered flowers and dirty wisps of bronze-coloured hair—boy, you *are n't* well—and innumerable knick-knacks which my lady had evidently worked with her own lily fingers. I've been through some of the letters; they get colder and colder, until they consummate in that last vile tirade I picked up from the floor. Then we found scraps of speeches and *printed* proclamations, all dealing with that blessed Princess Elizabeth; and, I say, Nicholas, there was one (not printed) giving his faithful lieges notice of the birth of an heir. And this note is scratched on the margin of the precious document: 'If a boy: Louis Walter Napoleon Paul.' "

Nicholas shuddered.

"So Carache and I cleared the whole place, and took what we wanted and burnt the rest. Then I laid my documents upon his Majesty's desk, everything open. Carache trotted round with a little more *sal volatile*, and the three of us supported him into his armchair, seating ourselves round him like guardian angels.

" 'Majesty,' commenced Carache,—he really manages the little chap splendidly,—'we must live in our fool's paradise no longer. That cruel letter convinces me that my suspicions are well founded. The Princess meant you to be killed; and it was only when you so courageously turned the tables upon your assailant that she ranged herself on your side. Her nerve failed her. Had you been less bold and determined, she would have assisted him in cutting your throat. The Eurasian whom you barely slaughtered was a frequent visitor at the villa all through November; I have the Prefect's word for it. He affirms positively that this woman was his mis—'

" 'No, not that!' cries Bonaparte. So our friend skips

a bit. 'Anyhow, her letter shows she bears you no love. She may kill you yet. Majesty, I regret to have to say it, you must discontinue your visits for a season.'

"To this the little fellow gave a willing enough consent. Nadez's blood still stank in his nostrils, one could see. We decided to move the Princess down to Cannes; Brisson is to take her directly after Christmas. She will remain there till baby is born—Louis Walter Napoleon Paul. *That* civilizes them; you may be sure she won't get up to any more tricks after that. Catharine Petrovna and she are likely in time, to become very good friends.

"But to return to Carache. He now took a higher flight. 'Sire,' he purred,—he really manages the little chap splendidly,—'it is time your Majesty ranged yourself. Forgive me for saying it, you are no exception to the remainder of your exalted family. They all had and have a spice of the dev—ahem, the devil in them; you have it too.' Nicholas, you should have seen the little fellow perk his head and try and hide the smile upon his face. Carache continued: 'But we, your responsible advisers, cannot allow you to jeopardize your valuable life. Sire, you must range yourself. The Grand Duchess is suitable in every way: you must accept the hand she so graciously offers you.'"

"What about Mu— Lord Framlingham's daughter?" burst out Nicholas. It was his one interruption.

"Boy, your stupidity is incomprehensible. Have I not told you,—we mean to move the Princess down to Cannes. Brisson is to take her directly after Christmas. She will remain there till baby is born—Louis Walter Napoleon Paul. *That* civilizes them; you may be sure she won't get up to any more tricks after that. Catharine Petrovna and she are likely in time to become very good friends. Don't interrupt again; I am nearly done. Napoleon's answer brought forward the same objection. 'I should be delighted,' the dear little creature murmured, 'only I am already engaged.' Carache at once began to soothe him; made Felix pour him out some more mixture, and put the glass and bottle at his elbow. And when Majesty had revived himself, he merely murmured

once more, 'I am engaged. The Princess, you know — Elizabeth of Pierrefonds — Meaux — you follow me?' So the Premier became very stern, giving our friend the only rough word throughout the whole of the interview. 'Please understand, sire, the Princess Elizabeth of Pierrefonds is entirely out of the question. Her Highness knows it better than you, it seems. She does not expect it, of that you may be quite sure. I have no wish to be cruel, but a burst of scornful laughter from the whole civilized world would accompany you two on your progress to the altar. The thing cannot be; once and for all, it cannot be.' 'But my word of honour?' moaned the little wretch. 'You must break it. She will forget it in a month or two amid the pleasures of maternity. Little Prince Louis Walter Napoleon Paul of Pierrefonds' — you may wager he blushed — 'will disperse all your cares, — all your remorse. Sire, in kings the heart is nearer the left hand,' which I call an absurd remark. 'I only wish,' this Carache, not me, '*my* little one were back again.' 'But — but —' flounders the Lord's anointed, 'I se — I de — I — I treated her as my wife solely on the understanding that she should become such.' 'That is her business.' 'But Carache, Carache, I love her!' 'The Grand Duchess Catharine Petrovna,' I here remarked, 'will not interfere with the usual facilities.' 'But Carache, Carache, I cannot live away from her!' Then the marvellous fellow arose in all his might and played his last card. 'Sire, I present you with the sole other alternative. You must abdicate.' Nicholas, you should have seen the Emperor's face. 'Abdicate!' he repeated, like one dazed. 'Yes, sire, abdicate. His Imperial Highness here will take your place. He is ready.' 'I am ready,' Felix acquiesced: Napoleon V, you know, — it will sound rather well.' 'Carache, are you serious?' gasped Napoleon IV. 'Alas, sire, absolutely. Monsieur Prehlen has his documents; I have mine. You must sign one or the other before we leave you.' 'And you, Cousin Felix, will you participate in this treachery?' 'But, dear cousin, there is no treachery. I have a greater right than the Princess's illegitimate offspring.' 'Very well,' retorted Bonaparte, as calmly

as you and I are chatting here, 'then I accept Catharine Pet—, whatever her miserable name is.' I shuddered, and got the papers ready. He shut his eyes tight and signed his name to the marriage preliminaries; then he flung down his pen, murmuring, 'The gods *were* right: Pimli—'; though what he meant, I really cannot tell you. I ejaculated, 'Sire, one minute—there remains the offensive alliance!' 'Oh, I have got a word to say about that,' remarked Carache, the snake and thief. 'We cannot embark on war yet a while—really we cannot.' 'Very well,' myself, with extreme hauteur; 'no war, no Petrovna.' 'I wish to God she were at the bottom of Red Sea,' murmurs Napoleon. 'Sire,' I answer, brief and contemptuous, 'she enjoys a face like a dream.' 'Come,' says Carache, 'we are n't going to knock a hole in the boat just as we sight land. You gave us a defensive alliance against Germany. We will do the same by you now.' 'If you fancy we intend to demean ourselves by tackling the Sea Spider alone, you make a very great mistake.' But in the end, dear disciple, I had to take a defensive alliance, with the chance of converting it in a year or so. I promised Carache," mused the artless fellow, "not to do anything to disturb the *statu quo*." Then he added in a burst of childish glee:

"I say, Nicky, *won't* we pull the crocodile's tail?"

"My precious ward and nephew," he proceeded, breaking into poetry, "very little remains. We put our horrid business to one side, and spent a most enjoyable evening. The four of us sat down to a *recherché* supper: the plovers' eggs and champagne left the greatest mark upon my memory. Abstemious little Bonaparte got quite tipsy. Towards the end, he insisted on making a speech all about 'Mu—Muri—Catha—Catharine,' and wound it up by smashing a glass to the honour of 'love—love—lovely women.' Ah, Nicholas, these dirty Westerners can't get drunk like gentlemen. Before we left, we carried him back to his study. The last I saw of him, he was sobbing on his sofa, murmuring 'Muriel Petrovna!' 'Muriel Petrovna!' On our way home, Carache informed me that Felix's intervention alone has cost the Treasury a hundred thousand francs. Still, we need not grumble:



it's all to our benefit. There, Nick, you have the whole story."

"I am not so sure," Nicholas answered, a break between every word. His icy deliberateness startled Prehlen.

"Why, lad, what's the matter with you? Why do you sit there glaring at me like that? I tried my hardest to get the full alliance. And your face is the colour of cigar-ash!—my grandson, what is the trouble, then?"

"And you think you have acted like honourable men?" burst out poor Fersen.

A faint light dawned upon his master's face. He whistled; and then as if he really could not contain himself, he broke out into a loud guffaw.

"Of course," he shook out, "the Framlinghams—Tipton—Southampton Havre—Muriel Petrovna—I really had forgotten all about *that*. Well, Nicholas, now's your chance. Spend a quiet month with her at Cannes, dear boy. She will be ready enough, I'll warrant. But mind, no follies! No Countess Fersen, or rubbish of that sort. What should I say to your mother?"

The Count sprang to his feet. Prehlen went with him to the door, soothing him the while. "Now, dear son, go and get some sleep. I shall want you this evening to take documents to the Palace."

But Fersen was not meditating bed just then. Even amid the throes of Prehlen's hideous narrative he had taken his resolve. And being a different sort of man to his successful rival, he set about its fulfilment then and there. His fur-lined overcoat and soft felt hat lay where he had flung them on his table. He donned them in sober silence without resort to gasconade, mental or muttered. He reached the Rue de Strasbourg by noon: it kept him an hour within its stifling waiting-room. He could bear it; each minute brought him nearer his beloved.

The seventy minutes or so of actual journey he spent reading and re-reading a letter (in faultless French and violet ink) which his mother had written for him, to humour him, and because she was a fond old woman unable to deny

her Promise anything. But neither mother nor son ever really thought the girl would need it. Sometimes, truly, among the autumn woods at Dmitroff, when the tears would start unsummoned, tears that come alone in grief for those dear ones that are irrevocable, he would suffer his mind to dwell on this contingency. For his own sake as much as her's he always stifled the beginnings of the dream; sweet still, alas!—such was his devotion. He always stifled it; and behold with how much need!

If Paris had been cold, Meaux with fewer houses likened the North Pole. The vehicle which crawled him from the station even pierced his furs. But the first sight of the Villa Yvonne managed to strike a peculiar little chill of its own to his already frozen heart. The warmth returned, however, when he discovered how easily he seemed to make his way into her presence. The woman who answered his summons accepted the whole six foot of him as the most natural thing in the world. She told him the Princess was at home, and disappeared to take the latter word, while Nicholas waited in what smelt to his nostrils like the Emperor's study. And she would see him too. His frame commenced to burn. He could scarcely get himself across the threshold. His heart surged and surged again at her first cry of greeting—"Dear Nicholas, how good of you to come!" And his brain never forgot her as he saw her then at that last lamentable meeting. His life still had many years to run—years spent among the silences of Dmitroff and the waste of bitter memories, shorn altogether of the love and brightness and children he might have looked for, brave man and pure that he was,—but he never forgot her as he saw her then.

Ah, how our fancies aid us. Girt about with all his chivalrous love, yet he read the bitter difference in her since their last meeting at Compiègne. He knew, he knew she had eaten of the tree. The ivory-tinted face was pallor now, pallor with deepening lines. He could hardly meet the feverish brilliance of the eyes. He dared not look down at her fragile figure. The fact that (pleased as she seemed to see him) she had not risen carried its bitter meaning. The stain touched everything,

soiling her white dress and her piteous spriteliness. My God! are we mortals then so rich to start with, that we can do these things!

Our poor young people, who might have been so happy if only Ambition had departed this world with Immortality and Innocence, spent but a short time on trivialities. Perhaps because they lacked trivialities to spend time on. She asked him about Dmitroff and got no further; while he—he could not even reach Dover. So before long he opened the purpose of his coming. It went to his heart to have to do it,—what did not go to his heart that hideous afternoon? But he had resolved to give her the substance of Prehlen's story. The truest kindness he grieved, demanded it. And having decided so much—well, he was n't Napoleon. He omitted very little, certainly neither the *sal volatile* nor the closing debauch. And it helped him when he found how quietly she took it, though he had never doubted either her shrewdness of judgment or her sense. She heard him to the bitter end without even a sigh to interrupt him. There were no covert tears, no outbursts of frenzied indignation, nothing save unconquerable weariness, with now and again a gentle smile for the stammering narrator.

"Ah, Nicholas," she said when he had finished, "*I know now.*"

He took her meaning instantly.

"Muriel, it is not yet too late. Twice I asked you, and twice you could not answer. Now I ask you again. See, my mother asks you too," and he thrust the letter into her hand. "Muriel, we wrote it that day I received your answer; we did not know but that you would need it after all. And you do need it, Muriel; and you will do what it asks?"

She read it calmly through. It summoned up the only tears she shed that day. For a moment she wavered.

"And go with you at once to Russia?" she murmured.

"Yes, yes. The room is ready for you. You shall have a year in peace alone with my dear mother. You shall not see a soul except her. And then, Muriel—per-

haps next New Year's Eve—when you are calm again and fairly happy, you shall give me my final answer. Muriel, I ask you the question still. You must confess I am waiting patiently.”

Her weakness continued.

“How noble you are, Nicholas. I fear—I fear,” she sobbed, “I should only disgrace your name.”

“Darling, do not speak like that. We need not give the matter a thought yet awhile. You are coming with me to Russia?—to-night! Anything to be rid of this accursed place.

“If only I had listened to you earlier! How I want a strong arm to help me! Nicholas, I shall never get it.”

And then all the old weariness returned. If it were only herself—this was the gist of what she said, and she said it without flinching—she would go that night Heaven knew she felt no desire to continue the hateful struggle. Yes, she would fly that night to the haven his goodness offered. She never wished to set further eyes upon the miserable coward, whose strength had been her blind stupidity.

“*But—*” and she said no more, leaving the hideous aposiopesis to blister in his heart. So she must fight it out to the bitter end. Nor did she despair of ultimate victory. No one had better cause to know the character of her precious opponent.

“Nicholas, he is rotten to the core. He is vacillating and mean-spirited and a coward. Before I met him, I never knew to what lengths human timidity could go. You should have seen him the night Nadez tried to kill him”—and she did not even shudder: it was the old moral insensibility Napoleon had loved in days gone by;—“the cur actually fainted. Even little Paul noticed. And with it all, he fancies himself the greatest hero the world has ever seen. He firmly believes that he won both Parfondrupt and Francheville; though all the world knows the contrary. Nicholas, it *is* true; he *was* in bed the whole twenty-four hours which hold those victories. He confessed as much to me—one night,” and she winced now. “And Nicholas, his lies! God knows I do not excuse myself; but—but—you will believe, dear

Nicholas, I should never have done this awful thing, only—only—he swore so many oaths. Nicholas, I never loved him. Why didn't some one help me? I was only a poor, silly girl. No, no, of course no one thought of giving me a helping hand. I was Muriel"—all spoken with biting scorn—"father's little counsellor," the one he always went to for advice. So, naturally, no one thought that I could stumble—oh, Nicholas, our wretched reputations!"

"I wanted to help you," he answered faintly. "Do you forget that afternoon coming back from Pierrefonds?"

She did not forget; but she said nothing.

She resumed presently with the more fruitful topic.

"You can hardly imagine I welcome the prospect. If I considered myself alone, I would never see the black-hearted wretch again. But, alas, I must make him marry me. And I can make him; no one knows what a creature he is. And when he has performed his word, I shall live quite away from him—Fontainebleau, perhaps—and scarcely see him once in the twelve months." It was the ruling passion strong in death. The picture of that dignified retirement, which should hold the nation's hope, pleased her and soothed her a little. To Nicholas it seemed the last conscious use of her sceptre. She knew—he could not help thinking—he loved her still; and so she strove thus to comfort him.

"He may say what he likes about scandal and the rest," she went on, getting more and more peaceful; "I will take no part in public life. He will have to manage his court as best he can alone; I won't help him. I shall have my own work to do, if—" and she broke off in manifest confusion.

"And suppose you do not succeed—what then?"

"Ah," she answered, once more quite weary, "I do not think that is likely."

"But, you will remember," he pleaded.

"Yes, I will remember. And, Nicholas, I thank you both very much."

"Tell me," he began afresh, "what about your people?"



She merely shook her head.

"Has not Walter even been to see you?"

"Do not be angry with him, Nicholas. Poor boy, he feels the dis—he feels it very much."

"I call him little better than a coward. I thought higher of him than that."

"He was coming," and the subject seemed to tire her; "he was coming. Mother wrote me only a week ago and told me to expect him any day. But the week has gone. He won't come now. What's the use?"

So their words drifted away into trivialities, and thence into silence. He rose to go; first bending over her hand with tender reverence. And she—she dared to touch his head with burning lips, an impulse of irrevocable farewell. She loved him now; and so she fancied she had loved him always. Perhaps she had. If she could not tell one way or the other, when he used to ask the question; certainly no one else can.

He got back to his room in the Rue de Grenelle to find no less a person than Lord Mendril pale and shivering in his arm-chair. And the young Russian's temper being such, he welcomed the Englishman with words hardly calculated to warm him. It was in every way a most chilling reception.

"So you have condescended to come at last," he muttered, scornfully. "How really noble of you! I wonder you did not send Charles instead. He seems to manage all these delicate matters. And your dear father, I trust he is very well? You may be pleased to hear that I have just returned from Meaux; also that your sister is thinking of accepting an invitation from my mother to spend the winter at Dmitroff. And the young lord merely hung his head.

For a long time Muriel remained where Fersen left her, inert and lifeless. She felt no surprise. She always knew that her lover was capable of any treachery. The night she saved his life, he went off vowing that not another day should divide her from her reward. And already three weeks had fled, and such was the gift brought by the beginning of the fourth. How she despised him!—how she despised herself! She still

awaited a reply to that last indignant letter of hers, which now reposed in Prehlen's bosom. The delay did not disquiet her. Her power continued; her confidence in it was no mere idle boasting. But she also recognized that power's prevailing source, and she shuddered. Assuredly his love must lead him here to-night—his love! she shuddered again. He would come slinking in like some whipt cur, all lies and promises. He would depart 'refreshed and strengthened' (to use his own inflated phrases), all promises and lies.

And suppose after all, his perjured weakness proved invincible? Take it he crowned his shifts and treacheries with this Russian marriage—what then? She surveyed the possibility, nor even faltered. Nay, she might have welcomed it, if only—once again that ellipsis which had cut so deep into Fersen's soul. She wanted no more thrones. She would have bartered Windsor itself to be rid of this hateful man. And the shame? She could not think of that; the miseries of the last two months had swamped it. We cannot all achieve the antique Roman model. Even Lucrece might have been less precipitate after eight weeks of horror. It isn't remorse that swells the yearly lists of suicides, but very present worry. We kill ourselves to escape, not to expiate. The poor woman yearned for a little peace. The silent woods at Dmitroff tempted her. Perhaps, the Assuager reaches us that way. She longed to feel the soothing of His fingers.

But the unborn child, whom both had wronged, demanded a last attempt. And she never doubted the result. To-night he should not leave her until the thing was settled beyond recall. Her plan stood ready within her brain.

But Napoleon's usual hour passed without him. Paul returned full of health from a walk that had taken him beyond Lagny. They supped; then went together to her room to spend the remainder of the evening. She got herself a book—Cashmere still, and the first pages—and dropped into her usual chair. The boy sat near her, sprawling over a letter to Avize. He was to go home next day.

And this meant her New Year's Eve, she pondered mournfully. But she resolutely turned her straying thoughts from Tipton. Dmitroff would lead her thither even yet.

Half-past eight—then he intended to come to-morrow instead. Well, she felt in no particular hurry. So she put him quite out of her mind, and settled to her travels. She may not have known it, but her inclination was leading her nearer and nearer the more peaceful way.

Suddenly she flung her book to one side.

"Paul," she cried, "I am going to Paris."

He stared.

"I am going to Paris, Paul; and you must accompany me."

"But I do not understand?"

"Child, the thing is perfectly simple. He arranged—but I am not bound to give you reasons. Run and get your things on. Also tell Eugenie to order the carriage. Paul, before you go, answer me this, do you want to do the Emperor a great service, one greater even than the other night?"

"Cousin Muriel," in tones of reproach.

"Listen then. When we get to the Élysée, you must manage to guide me into and through the palace so that I can reach his Majesty's study without meeting a soul."

The boy's brow clouded. "I do not see how I am to do that for you."

"Can you get me into the palace?" she asked.

"I think so," he said, still doubtful however. "But I know of no private corridors."

"We must trust the public ones. Only the Emperor is anxious that I should be seen by as few people as possible. He said you would be a safe guide."

"Did his Majesty really mention my name?"

"Yes."

"I will do my best," and the little fellow trotted off to the beginnings of his task, proud as Lucifer.

And he did his best. Arrived at the Paris terminus, he insisted on mounting beside the driver (and amid

falling-snow), the better to pilot that worthy to his own usual door. His usual *gen-d'armes* happened to be guarding it, and demanded no explanations. The stray servants whom they met along the silent passages wanted none either. The nearest they came to peril was the faint outline of old Godefroy stalking along in front of them. They halted, and presently the shadow disappeared. So he brought her out upon the sacred threshold. Lifting his hand, he said simply:

"The Emperor's study."

His Majesty might have been in the midst of a council of Ministers, it would have made no difference. Without the faintest pretence at tapping she pushed into the room.

"My dear child," Paul heard in faltering accents, "this is most indiscreet," and the door closed and the little fellow turned away. The boy remained a devoted Imperialist to the end of his days. And though the habit of evil-speaking never found its way into his nature, he could never get himself to say a good word for the Fourth Republic, still less for any of its rulers.

The Monarch lay stretched full length upon the great consoler. He made no attempt to rise. His bilious countenance had taken a greenish tinge from last night's debauch. The usual saffron of his face had gone into his tired eyes. His matted hair obscured all vestige of a parting. He resembled his great-grandfather as he had never done before. She could not help but notice it, busy as her poor brain was with other things.

She advanced to the centre of the room, and laid a sinister-looking parcel upon the table.

"My dear child," he faltered out once more, "this is most indiscreet." But the poor creature made no attempt to rise: he preferred to feel the pressure of support all along his frame in times of trouble, and the sofa could only do that for him.

The girl glanced defiantly at every part of the prostrate form except the face. "I cannot help the indiscretion," she blazed. "I am sick and tired of your excuses. I have come to ask you a single question. I had a visit from Nicholas Fersen this afternoon, he—"

"Oh, dear," groaned Bonaparte, "Muriel, I wish you wouldn't. You do your reputation no good by receiving such characters."

"You hypocrite."

"Muriel be reasonable."

"I have not come to talk and argue," she retorted vehemently. "I have heard words enough from you. Answer me this, is it true that you have signed a contract to marry that Russian thing? You are blushing—you *have* signed it, you coward! You coward!"

The brilliance of the lamp directly above her clothed her form. The silk shawl, her only headgear, had fallen away, her cloak as well. She was in evening dress. Her skin glistened under the light (and under jewels as well), as her bosom rose and fell in the wrath that shook her frame. For a single instant the love of former days surged back into his heart. The present image of her which it held lay seared by his desires. The vapours cleared away. She was again the careless schoolgirl whom he had met beside the river in days gone by, and whom he had loved so much. But her menacing gestures recalled the ugly memories that cut both off from her sweet innocence. He began in his turn to get angry.

"If I have signed it," he grumbled, "it is merely as a subterfuge."

"You traitor."

"Muriel, I won't be spoken to like that."

"Of course, I am to humour you and flatter your childish vanity, and profess to be satisfied with your lying promises. But I won't be satisfied with them any longer. I have had enough of them."

"Cannot you be reasonable, Muriel?"

She laughed shrilly. Could this sneering creature be his divinity of former days? Really he commenced to loathe her.

"It is easy for you to talk of reason," she cried. And that's just what it was—very, very easy. Why make further fuss about the matter? his heart kept murmuring. The mischief had been done. Not the heaviest ermine robe in Christendom would wipe away the memory of this scandal. Then let them both accept the



situation, and be happy in the way Carache suggested. Anything for a quiet life, groaned his torpid and easily placated conscience. And this seemed the simplest—the only road out of a sordid intrigue. So he started off once more, and in gentler tones:

“My dear Muriel, let us be reasonable. Let us review the situation like sensible people. The dearest wish of my life, you don’t need me to repeat it, is to make you my wife. My wife! What do I say?”—and he became for the moment quite genial—“my Empress I mean; for my wife you are already, and nothing can ever part us. And I am quite sure that I shall be able to effect this last step, if only we proceed very, very cautiously. My little gi—my wife must not do anything injudicious. She mustn’t, for instance, come rushing up to Paris at dead of night, or give interviews to loose young attachés who try to alienate her from her husband from her Walter by means of silly lies. She must not, in a word, make my task more difficult than it is. For it *is* difficult, very difficult. I won’t hide from you that sometimes I despair of success. They put such obstacles in my way. Prehlen and Carache between them never leave me a single minute. The latter won’t even let me mention your name: he burkes any discussion I may try to start on this dear topic. The Russian makes my life a burden with the praises of that infamous Catharine. He leaves her photographs about the room; he shall find that I am not the man to be intimidated by photographs—even when they are cabinet size and as ugly as hers are. But Muriel, we must go slowly. Nay, dearest, do not interrupt me; hear me to the end. We must go slowly, and we shall succeed. Suppose, however, we are beaten; that we have to bow to superior force—Muriel, Muriel, I beg! do n’t give way to ugly violence; my supposition is merely a supposition; only we must review the whole situation like sensible people. Suppose, then, Carache and Prehlen and the grand duchess prove too much for me. (O, Muriel, why weren’t you a grand duchess?) Should we not do well to accept the defeat? Let us be happy in spite of—”

She would keep silent no longer. Her face and neck were scarlet with anger.

"Say at once that I am to remain your mistress."

"Muriel do n't use that ugly word," he shuddered.

"No, but you do n't mind ugly deeds. You decoyed me down to Compiègne to de—"

"Good Heavens," he shouted, shuddering again, "have you not more modesty than that?"

"It is the truth."

Even a worm will turn in time. Her fury, the uncompromising directness with which she told him what she thought of him, and her not infrequent lapses into scornful laughter roused a corresponding temper in her opponent. He likewise began to laugh; the same pleasant, genial gaiety as hers.

"O, yes, it is the truth," he retorted, "we men are always to blame in these matters. Of course I enticed you down to Compiègne. It was I who encouraged you and your sche—your mother to disobey the Earl's command to refuse De Morin's invitation, of course, of course. And it was all hypocrisy on my part, when I offered to renounce you—all hypocrisy, and in reality part of my plan to get you in my power. You are not to blame, are you?" and his irony rose to sublime heights at this point; he really could not get any further for the sheer humour of the thing. As for Muriel, she was fumbling with the lace about her bosom. If her cowardly lover had only known it, he was nearer at that moment to a taste of Nadez's pistol than he had been formerly when the Eurasian had it (and him) in his grasp. So he went on merrily, his rage still at white heat:

"Of course, of course, I planned it all in order to ruin you. Naturally it never entered your head—not even down by the Marne, where you used to meet me night after night—that it would be a fine thing to be Empress of France, though you had to marry a man you never loved in order to achieve this dream. You never intrigued, did you? You did n't follow me to Paris, nor throw open a house which you had never lived in before? No, no, you were always innocent and child-like and pure

and single-minded. But enough of this," in tired tones, turning at the same time on his back and apostrophising the ceiling; "we are neither of us in a condition to talk further upon this painful subject. Ring the bell for Godefroy. He will get you quietly back to Meaux. I will write in the course of a week or so, when we are both calmer. But I warn you, Muriel, your brutality toward me to-night has shocked and grieved me. It has shown me your character in a new and painful light. I love you still; I shall treat you with justice; but I cannot henceforth think of you as though there were nothing between us, as though this unhappy incident had never happened. Good-night, Muriel. The bell is behind the silver Achilles in the corner."

"It is more than good-night, you traitor," she replied with a deliberateness which managed to find an unbruised spot in his already much mangled nerves. "I am going for good. I shall never see your coward's face again, thank God for it."

"To Count Fersen, I presume?" he sneered.

She started.

"Yes, I am going to Russia."

"Go then," came the brutal answer.

But the dawning life within her, which they both had wronged, drove her to make a last attempt.

"Walter, you cannot be so cruel!"

"Then return quietly to Meaux, and leave me in peace. I will write in a week or so. All will come right in the end."

The sinister-looking parcel lay where she had put it, on her first entry. She commenced to untie the string with feverish fingers. Napoleon turned languidly to survey her; the first sight of its contents roused him from his torpor.

"My—our proclamations!" he exclaimed, flushing scarlet.

"Count Fersen gave them to me."

"That wretched Prehlen!"

"Dear Walter, do n't fail me now that I want your help so much. I trusted you. Post these off to the newspapers—"

"Muriel, how can you be so foolish?"

She turned at once to the lace about her bosom. It was Nadez's pistol; and she laid the muzzle with much deliberation against her temple.

"Walter, this is what I shall do if you refuse."

She did it all very, very slowly; for a trump card which consists of an unloaded pistol has to be used discreetly. Alas, it did not await Napoleon's yielding! There was a flash, and then a sharp report.

"What—what—I did n't know—loaded—help, I am falling!" and she stiffened as she sank to the ground. It was not the silence of the woods round Dmitroff, but something just as quiet.

"Godefroy! she's hurt herself—she's bleeding—come to me! Muriel, get up and help me—I am fainting! Blood! Godefroy—can't you hear?"

## Chapter XIV

He did not faint, but turned his face to the wall and shut his eyes tight. He drew his knees up to his chin, at the same time burying his neck between his shoulders. Thus he lay like a ball, dazed and cowering. The flash, the report, and that fearful sight which came midway, had stunned him. He was powerless to think or to act. He could only listen.

He heard Godefroy burst into the room. He heard the startled cry the valet gave, and his silent withdrawal, to leave him, unhappy wretch that he was, quite alone with the Horror behind him. The pitiable creature felt that it had risen, and now stood bending over his prostrate body. He became rigid with a fresh wave of terror. He dared scarcely breathe.

"Muriel!" he managed to gasp out presently. He knew quite well he would get no answer. For a brief second his heart was swept with pity for his loneliness.

And then again there came the sound of wholesome men. He heard their awe-struck whispering as they lifted the body. The slow and measured step that followed trod into his brain. Then all was silent.

For a few minutes he lay absolutely still. Soon, however, a blast of panic seized and shook him, so that he cried aloud for help. No help came. The paroxysm only served to further exhaust him. And by and by he relapsed into his former dumb prostration. If his brain moved at all, it compassionated his own hideous flight. There entered into it no thought—"poor Muriel, whom I have betrayed and killed." He had journeyed too long in a fool's paradise for the scales ever to drop from his eyes.

At last he had discovered—he kept thinking—how easy a thing it was to be hurried into the midst of the



most ghastly tragedy, even with men who made it a rule never to swerve from their virtue and their good intentions. He had n't swerved; of that he felt quite confident. As men went, his life would bear comparison with any. Yet here he was prostrate in the shambles! If only the Framlinghams had not followed him to Paris, or the Countess had obeyed her husband! Why had n't *she* shown a little more prudence, a little more modesty, during that fevered week at Compiègne? All these horrors might thus have been avoided; and at this moment he would have been leading a peaceful, domestic life with Catharine Petrovna. Instead of which, months of bother and worry lay between him and that happy time; indeed he very much feared whether he would ever quite purge his brain of the memory of her horrible death.

Presently he became conscious—vaguely conscious, as one does in a dream, or in the first seconds of recovery from fainting—of some one in the room. It was that abominable cousin Felix, perched on the head of his sofa, the little wretch's knees brushing Napoleon's brow, while the little wretch himself chattered inanities as though this were not the chamber of death.

"I happened to be passing," he started off, "so I ran in to see how my dear boy was. I dined at Prehlen's; truly a superb dinner. We had caviare and a *croûte-au-pot* which would have made a codfish weep, and plovers in aspic and the tenderest duck I have ever tasted and a plum-pudding *a l'araignée de mer vaincue*, not to mention strawberries and an ice *a la Grande Duchesse*. I drank Chablis and Moselle and champagne, because I think it is wisest never to mix but to stick to one colour. Carache followed my example. So did Prehlen. The chamberlain kept to port. The only others of the party were one of Prehlen's attachés, whom the Ambassador called Nicholas, and Nicholas's friend, a young fellow whom I should imagine was an Englishman by the marked way in which he avoided the plum-pudding. These young men mixed their wines in the most disgusting manner. I can't think what induced his Excellency to include them among such distinguished guests."

"Godefroy!" groaned Bonaparte.

"It's Felix," shouted his companion in tones that were meant to be as soothing as they certainly were loud, "Felix, your affectionate cousin who has come in to make tender enquiries about your health. De Morin and Carache both said that you were n't quite the thing after our little party last night, so I have dropped in to cheer you up and sing to you a little. Shall I sing to you?"

"Godefroy!"

"Hush, dear one, don't get hysterical. Listen, I will tell you what we talked about at Prehlen's. We had a most interesting conversation. We all agree that this marriage of yours will make our beloved countries the arbiters of the world. Our brother in Berlin—whom by the way you let off rather lightly—will have to wait a long time for his opportunity to recover Lower Alsace. Personally, I have the greatest respect for his Teutonic Majesty. As I read in one of their papers, a day or so back, and as I think myself, he is a man of modern ideas, enthusiastically devoted to his exalted mission—namely, that of promoting the happiness of a generous nation, and accessible to all the lofty ideals which a period of stress and storm puts to the test. He and I, likewise, have many things in common. We both paint. We both use those dummy rowing-machines which come from London, he every morning in his palace, I every morning in mine. I should like to see him on it. I wonder whether he 'buckets,' as they say in England. I wonder what he wears. I wear a silk gauze vest with a bee rampant on chest and back, and white flannel knickerbockers, likewise sprinkled with bees. I wonder whether he also uses gauze. If he does, I feel quite sure he has the German eagle wherever there's room for it. Anyhow, however admirable he may be as a man, however much he resembles me in tastes and character, he will once more have to bow his neck to the Franco-Russian yoke. Prehlen says he won't like it. I am rather of the contrary opinion. He is a man of marvelous resource; he will find compensation elsewhere. He will turn his attention to England, until we are ready for the Sea Spider. He will humiliate her in every pos-

sible way; bully her before all Europe; gain moral victories over her by means of the penny post and the *Rhine Gazette*, moral victories that shall wipe out any little indiscretions that may have marked the commencement of his reign. He is a marvellous young person; and we French ought to be exceedingly grateful to him. If it had n't been for him, we might not even have won back—a hem—Lower Alsace. By the way, Prehlen will send you round the papers to night."

"Prince Felix," moaned the sufferer, "won't you please come back in the morning? I am very unwell."

"My place is beside the sick-bed (yea, the death-bed) of my most beloved relative. Do not give way to unmanly terrors, dear one, your own Fely-Wely is with you. Are you faint?" with growing concern.

"Yes," whispered his Majesty, "extremely faint."

"Do you feel a pain here?" the Prince went on, laying his fat hand over the region of the imperial stomach.

"Yes."

"Acute?"

"Terribly acute."

Felix at once became very friendly and eager. He sprang off his ledge above the Emperor's head, and commenced to prance about the room in a state of great excitement.

"Brandy," he exclaimed, rummaging among the Emperor's drawers, "that's what you want. *Angina pectoris*—poor father, you know—beginning of the end—fearful pain for an hour or two—terrible contraction of the chest—fortitude, my brave cousin! You will be at peace to-morrow."

"Felix, for heaven's sake stop jumping about the room."

"I must jump, I feel so happy. Besides, I am looking for the brandy."

"I do n't keep brandy in my desk. Please ring the bell for Godefroy, and go away."

"I call you extremely unkind," the Prince answered, coming back to his seat on the sofa. "I am a very much better sick-nurse than a score of your fat Godefroys. My Swedish nightingale says I am, and she ought to

know. I do n't believe you 've got anything the matter with you. It 's all pretence and humbug. *Angina pectoris* is not for such as you. Cousin Louis, you 're a wild young dog. I 'm a trifle dissipated I admit, but I do n't go shooting young ladies when I am tired of them."

"Godefroy, please come to me."

"He won't come to you, you may be quite sure. He and I are equally disgusted with you. I shall have to take you in hand, otherwise you will be getting us into very bad odor indeed. Cousin Louis, it would have been a thousand times better for every one if you had stayed in Pimlico; you do n't understand these things."

"I did n't shoot her."

"You did."

"I did n't. Please go away."

"Well, whether you did or not, it does n't show you up in any more agreeable light. I believe you both agreed to commit suicide; and now you 're frightened. I adhere to my former statement; it would have been a million times better for every one had you stayed in Pimlico."

"You are insolent."

"I merely say what is the truth. Could n't you go back?"

"You are insulting. Please go away."

"Louis, Louis, do not be so hasty. I do n't mean go back to the life your own merits won for you in former days. Of course we should make you an allowance. And I would write to the government. They might be prevailed upon to give you a judgeship or a bishopric. You would like that, is it not so, Louis? Fancy you Bishop of—of—of Whitechapel, for example! What a guide you would be to them."

At that moment rescue came.

"Thank God," murmured Bonaparte, "here is Godefroy."

The old valet laid a hand upon Felix's shoulder and drew him gently from his perch toward the door. The Prince made no effort at resistance, merely turning to fire a parting shot from the threshold.

"Bishop of Whitechapel, Louis!—the thing is well worth considering."

"Sire," Godefroy exclaimed, when master and servant were alone, "this is a bad business."

"Oh, Godefroy," cried Bonaparte, "you don't think I shot her?"

"No, I know you did not," answered the other gravely. The old fellow's voice, his face, his very attitude, were eloquent of the most intense compassion. But it was not compassion for the shivering survivor in front of him.

"Poor, poor child," he murmured, "if only she had listened to Marshal Brisson."

"Anyhow," Bonaparte retorted doggedly, "I did n't kill her."

"Ah," whispered the butler, still in meditation, "the great God will be kindest to her soul. Sire, I have sent for the Premier and M. de Morin. Till they come, you must not stir."

Left alone once more, the Emperor tried to sleep. He did doze off, only to be awakened presently by some one tapping gently at the door.

He had strength enough to murmur the necessary words. A voice he did not recognize rapped out:

"Sire, I bring these papers from the Russian Ambassador."

"Lay them down," groaned his Majesty without moving.

"He desires me to take back word whether they are found in form."

"He shall know to-morrow."

"Sire," the familiar unrecognized voice continued, a trifle more brusquely, "I have a friend here who desires to speak with you."

His Majesty turned lazily over. His brain was hardly prepared for what he saw.

Nicholas Fersen stood beside the table (almost on the spot where *she* had stood, just now, and died); while no less a person than Lord Mendril himself occupied a few yards of carpet just short of the door, his back firmly set against that useful article.



Napoleon made no attempt to stir. Both the intruders glowered at him.

"Let me tell you, young gentlemen," the Sovereign commenced, "I am not in a mood to bandy words with you." This sudden access of energy surprised him very much. He went on: "I must ask you both to withdraw."

"Have you locked the door?" Fersen asked of his companion.

"Yes."

"Now, Monsieur, we have a word or two to say to you."

"I refuse to listen. Put the papers on the table as I ordered you just now, and go away."

Fersen obeyed to the extent that he laid his documents on the top of their—*her* proclamations. Napoleon caught sight of them and shuddered. He would get short shrift, he felt, if this wretched Oriental discovered them and proceeded to put piece and piece together.

"Now, then, Mendril," prompted the latter.

"Nicholas, old fellow, do you begin."

"Very well. Monsieur, we have come to demand reparation for your cruel conduct to Mademoiselle."

"I do not understand you," Bonaparte rejoined sullenly.

"We thought you might not. Cowards like you are not quick at catching the force of such words."

"You are an insolent cad. You shall pay for this. You shall languish in jail for life; you shall be deported to New Caledonia. You, too, Lord Mendril. You are in France now, not at Oxford; and you shall find out that you cannot insult the head of the state with impunity."

"No more of this foolery," cries Fersen, keeping all the while provokingly cool and deliberate. "You have got to fight one of us—Mendril or me, we don't care which. And you may choose your own weapon."

"A duel!" gasped his Majesty, quite overcome by the boldness of the idea.

"Exactly."

"You do n't expect me to go out and fight a duel at this time of night?"

"It won't be necessary to leave this room. We shall fight here."

"Fight here?" repeated the Emperor in a dazed way; "really I do n't understand you?"

"The thing is quite simple. The room is a good size; and if it is to be swords we can clear the table out of the way."

"For heaven's sake do n't do anything of the kind."

"You prefer pistols?"

"I certainly sha'n't fence."

"Very well, let it be pistols. Choose your man."

The Emperor did not deign an answer.

"Nicholas, we shall have to toss," and Mendril produced a coin which he spun and caught in his left hand.

"Heads!" cried Nicholas.

"Tails it is," replied the other with a note of triumph.

"I likewise prefer pistols. The only question is, where are we to get them from?"

"Monsieur, does not that door yonder lead into your dressing-room?"

"Yes, it does," grumbled Monsieur.

"You keep pistols in there?"

"Indeed I do nothing of the kind. If you want weapons you'll have to ring the bell."

"Walter, there is no help for it. You must leave me to mount guard over our friend. Do you slip round to my rooms and bring mine. For God's sake be careful how you go."

"Nicholas, the thing is utterly impracticable. I should never get through a second time."

"I fear not. What's to be done?—I suppose Walter, you could n't fight with razors?"

"I'm willing enough."

"Or the fire-irons?" glancing regretfully at the poker.

"Nicholas, let's horsewhip him and have done with it. We have been here long enough; we shall be discovered if we do n't take care."

"Honestly I don't know what to say." A minute later the young Russian gave a shout of triumph:

"Walter, is *yours* a sword-stick?"

"It's one of your's, Nick; so I'm sure I don't know." Walter gave an anxious pull at the handle of his cane. "If it is, it's confoundedly sti—by Jove, Nicky, it *is*. What a piece of luck."

Nicky, who, as it will be noticed, had a considerable weakness for these sanguinary utensils, had already bared his own glittering blade. He gave it a triumphant flourish above his head, then held it across the table, handle foremost, for Napoleon to take.

The Emperor backed against the wall.

"Keep it away! keep the nasty thing away! I tell you I can't fence."

"Mendril shall use his left hand."

"This is assassination!" cried our hero. "You young men shall lose your heads over this business."

"Will you take the stick," urged Fersen, dangling it very little more than an inch above the imperial nose.

"Do n't I tell you, you murderer, that I can't fence?"

"I insist upon your taking it."

"I refuse. I can't fence; and if I could, I would n't. You forget who I am. I am the Emperor. The Emperor does n't fight duels with a couple of drunken young men."

"For a third time I demand that you should take it."

"For a third time I refuse. If you like to slay a defenceless man in cold blood, that's your business. I shall not rise from this sofa. If you fancy that I shall attempt to defend myself with the poker, or that I shall endeavor to ring the bell, you are quite mistaken. I do not intend to raise a finger. See, I bare my breast! Strike, you young assassins!"

Lord Mendril had already sent his rapier home into its covering once more.

"Nicky, it's no use."

"I am afraid not. I knew he was a coward."

"Is it cowardly to await the cut-throat's blow, calmly reposing with bared breast on one's sofa?" demanded

Cæsar. "Really you young men are behaving in a ridiculous fashion. You had much better go quietly away."

The two boys looked at one another rather despondingly. Cæsar, prostrate upon his sofa, his breast bared to anything, from the assassin's dagger to a horsewhip, proved rather a difficult nut to crack.

"What do you mean to do with my sister?" Mendril persisted.

Napoleon could n't take his eyes off the proclamations. Fersen was getting nearer to them every minute. They almost touched the last button of his waistcoat. For all the poor Emperor knew, they might be spattered with blood.

The young Englishman repeated his question.

"What do you mean to do with my sister?"

"Do you intend to keep her on at Meaux as your mistress?" Fersen blazed out.

"At least I owe no explanation to you," our hero retorted, his mind still busy with the proclamations—the possibly blood-bespattered proclamations.

"You owe it to all who have the power to demand one," muttered the Count.

"How dare you say that?"

"Fersen, do keep quiet. Sir, answer me. What do you propose to do with my sister?"

"I will answer you, Lord Mendril. In your case the matter is very different. I recognize your right to question me. Believe me I can sympathize with your anger—there, I confess it." And he straightway proceeded to brandish an olive-branch.

"Come back here in the morning—alone, mind. You and I between us can then review the situation. We shall both be calmer in—in the morning."

The young lord was obviously wavering.

"There is no situation to review," interrupted that confounded Muscovite. "You have lied to the young lady, and betrayed her, and now you are meaning to marry some one else."

"You are an exceedingly ill-bred young man. You seem to forget that you are speaking to the Emperor. You shall smart for your impertinence. Lord Mendril I

have told you the extent to which I can go. Kindly remove your friend, and return alone in the morning."

"We have not done with you yet," exclaimed the turbulent Nicholas. "You forget that we have the door locked, and that we do n't mean to let you get near the bell."

Napoleon groaned.

"You are a coward thus to threaten an unarmed man."

"We are practically unarmed as well," retorted Fersen, eagerly. "Let me fetch a couple of swords from your dressing-room—provided you keep anything so deadly there. Either of us is willing to fight you. You won't avail yourself of our sword-sticks."

"I have told you a dozen times already I *won't* fight. I am the Emperor."

"Emperor or no Emperor, we mean to get some satisfaction out of you before we leave this room. If Mendril took my advice, he would horsewhip you."

"You shall smart for this."

"Get up and face me like a man. You dare n't. You can only bully women and weakly girls."

"Fersen, do be quiet," Walter interposed. "Let us hear what he suggests."

"Come back in the morning."

"No, I must hear now."

"I won't be ordered about in this way," shouted poor Bonaparte, flinging both feet in the air and bringing them down with a whack upon the springs. "I will have both you young men thrown into prison."

"We do n't budge till you have told us," rasped out Fersen.

The monarch turned round once more to the light. "Mendril," he said, raising his head the least little bit from his pillow and gazing straight at Walter, "have your people left yet?"

"No, they have n't."

"Look here, Mendril, what do you say to take my wi—your poor—your dear sister off to India? The voyage will do her heaps of good. Simla will bring the roses back into her cheeks; and I—I will write her a



letter in a week or so, when we are both calmer." He really began to believe that the poor creature was still alive. Fersen brought him back to his senses.

"She will come to Dmitroff," he grumbled.

"No, that she never will," Napoleon answered maliciously. He turned back to Lord Mendril:

"Well, Mendril, what do you say?"

"It is for my parents to decide."

"You shall communicate with them at once. Let me ring for Godefroy to bring you a form."

"You do n't get near the bell."

"Count Fersen, I disdain to notice your rudeness. Mendril, consider the matter well; sleep on it, in fact, and let me have your answer in the morning."

"I call it a cowardly suggestion. You are tired of the young lady—God help her! poor thing—and now you want her parents to take her off your hands. Mendril, reflect, you take away all chance your sister has of rehabilitating herself."

"Ah, Nicholas, but it will be happier for her."

"Shame is never happy."

"Lord Mendril is right," broke in the recumbent philosopher. "It will be happier for her. The wealth of love I should offer her would not make up for all the miseries the ermine brings. Besides—besides I fear the memory of our common weakness would never completely pass away. It would always hover like a ghost between us. No, she had much better go to India."

Walter Mendril conceded a single step.

"I will find out what my people have to say."

"That's a wise fellow."

"What about the girl herself?" cried Fersen.

The gentle Mendril lapsed for a moment into the Honourable Charles.

"I do n't think she need be considered," he blazed out.

"His lordship is right," chimed in the sofa. "Her conduct in the past shows clearly that she is not the best judge of her own interests."

Fersen was too overcome even to concur; Bonaparte stroked his chin, his face wearing the bright dawn of returning complacency.

"Or look here, Mendril," that Potentate went on, "why can't you get some decent fellow to marry her, and set up a happy home for her. There must be a heap of men over in dear old England who would only be too glad. Some one a *leetle* bit her social inferior, I mean. In a month or two she will be just as pretty as ever she was. Poor girl we all want her to have a little peace. She's been through so much."

"Listen to this cur!" gasped Nicholas. He lifted the papers which he had brought with him; nothing remained to keep the blood-stained proclamations from the light of day. Bonaparte shuddered. But the infernal Muscovite having given one flourish with the damaging documents laid them back upon poor Muriel's. And the Emperor breathed again.

"Look here, Mendril," his Majesty recommenced when he had so far recovered, "I tell you frankly, I am very, very sorry for what I have done. I own it. I would give worlds to undo it. I curse myself every day for my conduct—yes, my treachery to your poor sister. But the thing now is, alas, irrevocable. We cannot go back, grieve how we may. Believe me, I *do* grieve most bitterly. Communing with myself I can find no words hard enough to describe my conduct. But as I said just now we can't go back. And exigencies of State will not permit me to go forward. The dearest wish of life was—is to have your sister as my Empress. Unhappily, all my ministers tell me the thing is impossible. Believe me, dear Mendril, when I say the burden weighs every bit as heavily on me. I do not want to marry this Russian princess. She is not pretty. I want to marry your dear sister, and I cannot because she is dea—denied me by the exigencies of State. Mendril, do n't you see my point? Things being as they are, cannot we manage to make the best of them? Take it your parents do n't care for India. Very well, Monar—kings frequently contract morganatic alliances in these days, without disgrace to either party."

The Englishman answered never a word.

"We shall be so happy, your dear sister and I. She shall have everything she desires. You, all of you, will

come and visit her; and—and I will strive by my devotion to make up for my treachery in the past."

Once again, for the time being he forgot that she lay dead in some adjoining room.

"Walter, how can you even listen to such disgraceful proposals?"

"Count Fersen, the matter does not concern you."

"It does concern me. I would rather see the poor girl dead—what is this?"

He had stumbled upon the proclamations. They *were* spattered with blood.

Bonaparte shivered.

Next minute the young Russian's foot had struck something hard.

"And this?" he cried.

He dived beneath the table, and brought the pistol and the dead woman's silk shawl to light.

"And this?" he repeated. "There is blood upon it!"

His face, meanwhile, had grown very white and drawn. His voice had become terribly deliberate. Napoleon could not meet the eyes that seemed to him to blaze down into his soul.

"She has been here?" Nicholas thundered out. The cowering wretch dared not lie.

"My God, Walter, what *does* this mean?—quick, the inner room—she may be there."

Walter had sprung across the threshold before the words were well out of the other's mouth. The next instant a cry rose to heaven.

"Speak to me, Muriel! I am your bro—Nicholas! help! she is dead."

But Fersen did not move.

"An accident—blood—getting better—next room—convalescent, marry her," the hunted creature gasped out, appealing eyes turned on his pursuer. He saw the Russian lift a threatening arm and hurl something at him. And he saw no more.

\* \* \* \* \*

The sound of confused voices and hurrying feet broke in upon the silence. Abrupt fingers clutched the outer handle of the door—then Godefroy's voice:

"It is locked!"

"Break it open!" from Carache.

Some one flung his whole weight against the wood-work. Once—twice—the third blow the door thundered down.

Carache, De Morin with him, and the butler heading a crowd of palace servants flowed forward—to fall back reverently before the worthless dead.

Only, De Morin muttered:

"Poor nephew Louis! The best way out of it, I think."

And Carache made answer, "The best way," in the same low tones.

Then the Premier added more cheerfully:

"I will despatch a telegram to Havre."

The chamberlain smiled. "Carache, you are a wonderful fellow."

THE END.

PRINTED AT THE LAKESIDE PRESS  
FOR HERBERT S. STONE & CO.  
PUBLISHERS, CHICAGO









CP+

---

100











UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

Los Angeles

This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

REC'D LD-URL  
A NOV 12 1990  
SEP 17 1990

University of California, Los Angeles



L 006 022 584 4

